RADIOHEAD

THE BENDS

RADIOHEAD
the bends

Critical raves for The Bends...

"The Bends (is) a moody, artful slice of feedback opera..."
Entertainment Weekly, May 19, 1995

"A nugget of pure pop pulses at the heart of every acridly whimsical track on **Radiohead**'s sophomore effort. Thom Yorke's voice is almost as enticingly enigmatic as Smashing Pumpkins' Billy Corgan's, though of a more delicate constitution, and there's spry guitar aplenty to complement it."
Los Angeles Times, May 7, 1995

"'My Iron Lung' offers a pretty, gentle melody that suddenly bursts into a hailstorm of harsh guitar riffs, while 'Planet Telex' and the title song toss and turn like the best of those big restless Pearl Jam and U2 arena-size anthems. On the flip side, 'Bulletproof...I Wish I Was' is so delicate and weightless, it seems to be floating, and the stately, baroque '(Nice Dream)' sounds like one. . .These 'Bends' won't hurt at all."
People, April 17, 1995

"**Radiohead** is back with The Bends, a compelling fusion of lyrical despair and corrosive guitar. From the explosive "My Iron Lung" to the dreamy "Bulletproof...I Wish I Was," The Bends is solid rock & roll -- straight up."
US Magazine, April 1995

"This is phenomenal..."
J.D. Considine, Baltimore Sun, on VH1 "4 On The Floor", April 1995

"The Bends proves that **Radiohead** didn't shoot their bolt with 'Creep.'"
Alternative Press, April 1995

(continued)

"...All of these tracks are potential modern rock winners, capable of pushing The Bends to dizzying heights."

Billboard, April 8, 1995

"**Radiohead** follows up on the success of 1993's Pablo Honey. . .with The Bends, another fine example of the band's ability to combine a diversity of musical styles into one highly listenable collection. . . ."Fake Plastic Trees" is about as radio-friendly as you can get, starting with a light, memorable melody draped atop an acoustic guitar and concluding with a progression of plaintive strings, mellow organ and lofty drums."

CMJ New Music Report, March 27, 1995

"It's a powerful, bruised, majestically desperate record of frighteningly good songs."

Q, March 1995

"**Radiohead** has moved on, and offer twelve examples of why they're one of the UK's big-league, big-rock assets."

Select, March 1995

LOS ANGELES TIMES
May 7, 1995

POP MUSIC

Record Rack

★★★ **Radiohead, "The Bends,"** Capitol. A nugget of pure pop pulses at the heart of every acridly whimsical track on Radiohead's sophomore effort. Thom Yorke's voice is almost as enticingly enigmatic as Smashing Pumpkins' Billy Corgan's, though of a more delicate constitution, and there's spry guitar aplenty to complement it.

—*S.M.*

US

April 1995

essentials

hear it

■ **RADIOHEAD**, the melancholy English quintet best known for its *angst*-ridden anthem "Creep" (off of *Pablo Honey*, the band's gold debut), is back with *The Bends*, a compelling fusion of lyrical despair and corrosive guitar. From the explosive "My Iron Lung" to the dreamy "Bulletproof...I Wish I Was," *The Bends* is solid rock & roll — straight up. (Capitol)

A.P.
ALTERNATIVE + PRESS
NEW MUSIC NOW

April 1995

RADIOHEAD
The Bends

The bends are what you suffer when you emerge from the depths of the ocean too quickly. It's a pain with which Radiohead can probably identify. *Pablo Honey*, their two-year-old debut, went gold, but it was only on the strength of "Creep," yearning, laconic, bitter, betrayed and special (so fucking special), a one-off flash of brilliance amidst elsewhere, mere competent Britpop. One "Creep" was all they had, and they've been duly castigated for it.

The Bends, under those conditions, is not a follow-up album; it's a dozen follow-up singles, and almost as many new ideas. Zip past the opening "Planet Zero," which echoes old Smiths' guitars amidst new U2 structures, and *The Bends*' greatest asset is its approximation of London Suede, all the parody and none of the pomp, a vision, perhaps, of Brett Anderson's future now that he no longer has the butler to deliver his lyrics on silver-plate guitars. "High And Dry" and "Fake Plastic Trees" are the heaviest nods Dog Starwards, but once the idea's taken hold, it's a hard one to shake.

So is the ghost of "Creep," and there are periodic stabs in the same sonic direction. Thom Yorke's vocals hang heavy in John Leckie's mix, so it's hard to figure out just what he's on about. But even without the catch-phrases, "Just" has a savage resonance to set the nostalgia buds pulsing (plus, it smells of teen spirit, if only a little), while the brilliantly titled last single, "My Iron Lung," visits enough musical pastures, and sounds so painfully desolate ("I'm special..."), that time alone will tell if this is the exorcist Radiohead need, or just a passing second cousin. Either way, *The Bends* proves that Radiohead didn't shoot their bolt with "Creep." That there's a lot more stirring down there than their recent past might admit. **(Capitol)** —*Dave Thompson*

Billboard

April 8, 1995

Album Reviews

▶ **RADIOHEAD**
The Bends
PRODUCER: John Leckie
Capitol 29626

Sophomore effort by U.K. alternative icons pushes the same modern rock buttons as their gold-certified debut, "Pablo Honey," with Thom Yorke's vocals shifting from caustic to mellifluous, and the band's music from acoustic balladry to hard-rock riffing or from industrial noise to Beatles-inspired pop. This alchemy of styles is most effective on first single "Fake Plastic Trees," "High And Dry," "Just," "Black Star," and "Street Spirit (Fade Out)." All of these tracks are potential modern rock winners, capable of pushing "The Bends" to dizzying heights.

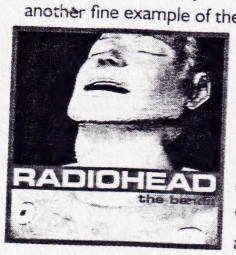
CMJ NEW MUSIC REPORT
March 27, 1995

JACKPOT!

RADIOHEAD *The Bends*

Capitol, 1750 N. Vine St., Hollywood, CA 90028

Radiohead follows up on the success of 1993's *Pablo Honey* (which featured the runaway hit "Creep") with *The Bends*, another fine example of the band's ability to combine a diversity of musical styles into one highly listenable collection. *The Bends* also reveals Radiohead's penchant for Euro-influenced rock right from the opener, "Planet Telex," which capably twirls simple U2 themes with '60s psychedelia and then adds a dark, sopping mass of distorted guitars. "Fake Plastic Trees," while somewhat calculated in its arrangement, is about as radio-friendly as you can get, starting with a light, memorable melody draped atop an acoustic guitar and concluding with a progression of plaintive strings, mellow organ and lofty drums. While *The Bends* sometimes secures a bit of its sound from studio effects (check out the marvelous left-right tremolo on "Bones"), they're never used as a replacement for artistic substance, but rather to add flavor and contrast to the mix. Other easily digestible tracks: the Beatles-ish "Just (You Do It To Yourself)" and the Hendrixian-riffed "My Iron Lung." *AARON CLOW*



Q Review
April 1995

RADIOHEAD
The Bends
PARLOPHONE PCS 7272

Of all the recent indie-rock second-comings, from Suede to The Stone Roses, the second LP from this Oxford five-piece could prove to be the most significant. Shunned by a fickle music press after releasing their debut Pablo Honey album in February 1993, Radiohead quietly and determinedly went about their business, touring non-stop in America and ultimately shifting a stunning one million albums worldwide. If the spotlight is bound to be more focused for this release, everything about The Bends is well up to scrutiny. It's a powerful, bruised, majestically desperate record of frighteningly good songs. Singer Thom Yorke's vocal mix of weary angst and strained bewilderment remains bewitching, while the charismatic, shuddering musical storm brewed up by his band is often intoxicating. They haul their emotions across a musical wrack which stretches from the scorched thunder of Just and Planet Telex to the deadly, gripping delicacy of Nice Dream and High And Dry. ★★★★
David Roberts

STAR RATINGS

The Q star ratings are given carefully. Q's reviewers are fallible, naturally, but we do aim to offer a clear and informed impression of the work under review. Here's what the star ratings signify:

★★★★★
Indispensable. Truly exceptional.

★★★★
Excellent. Definitely worth investigation.

★★★
Good. Not for everyone, but fine within its field.

★★
Average. Caution advised.

★
Poor. Best avoided.

SELECT
March 1995

The 'Head: Faustian pact with demonic deity in charge of stadium rock?

HARRY BORDEN

RADIOHEAD
The Bends
PARLOPHONE

This is the media wisdom on phase two of Radiohead's career. They want to be the indie U2. They've tried to make 12 versions of 'Creep'. And 'Creep' was crap in the first place. OK, you lot, outside! Once a band becomes popular over the pond without first acquiring godlike hipness in this green and pleasant land, folk usually get suspicious. The lengthy gestation period that has finally produced 'The Bends' won't have helped, but surely tens of thousands of Americans can't be wrong. Well, they can, actually, but that's not the point.

Forget all that, and hipness be damned: 'The Bends' is set to be a monster album simply because it deserves to be. Fate is at this very moment flossing her dentures in readiness to smile upon them, without the band having undertaken any Faustian pacts with the demonic deity in charge of stadium rock. In fact, 'The Bends' captures and clarifies a much wider trawl of moods than 'Pablo Honey', as the familiar Radiohead cranked-up guitar pop is mixed in with a '60s English melancholia. Sounds like they've been listening to The Beatles, maybe even Nick Drake, in their spare time.

This sort of soundscape's ideal for Thom Yorke. He's got the perennial look of the down-at-heel trainee sex symbol waiting to make the grade, with maybe a touch of the bedroom poet who takes himself a bit too seriously. His lyrics here are full of decay and ennui – *"I wish it was the '60s/I wish I could be happy/I wish that something would happen"*, he gripes over the roaring guitars of the title track.

He's in fine voice throughout, sounding especially impressive on acoustic songs like the current double-A-side track 'High And Dry'. The exquisite melody, delivered with such choirboy purity, is whistleable enough to distract from disturbing lines like *"When your insides fall to pieces/You just sit there wishing you could still make love"*. The baroque 'Street Spirit' is another disarmingly vulnerable melody, intoned again with unforeseen fragility by the peroxide frontman.

Ultimately, though, Radiohead are still more exciting when they let rip, but if 'Creep' was set to be a millstone that problem is avoided with ease. The other half of 'High And Dry', 'Planet Telex', is in a more straightahead indie turbo-angst vein, but the presence of veteran producer John Leckie (Stone Roses, Ride, The Verve, er, Pink Floyd) adds new depth to the sound, distilling a potent blend of rawness and cool, and, on this track, a swirling near-psychedelic feel. Both 'Bones' and 'Just (Do it To Yourself)' could follow it into the charts – great songs with guitarist Jonny Greenwood adding an extra edge, stumbling onto some wayward routes often, it seems, completely by accident.

And if anyone actually wants 12 versions of 'Creep', they're advised to buy another eleven copies of that single from WH Smith's Golden Oldies department and go off and join the Vegetable Kingdom. Radiohead have moved on, and offer 12 examples of why they're one of the UK's big-league, big-rock assets. ■■■■□

DAVE MORRISON

RADIOHEAD

U.K. PRESS

SELECT
April 1995

Far left: the 'Head in '95 (from left) Jonny Greenwood, Ed O'Brien, Thom Yorke, Phil Selway, Colin Greenwood

SELECT
April 1995
(page 2)

YOU'VE COME A LONG WAY, BABY...

story by GINA MORRIS
photos by HARRY BORDEN

The secret life of Radiohead

From playing gigs to two men and not even a dog to getting mobbed at Glasto, from busking in Oxford and Elvis Costello covers to MTV and 'Planet Telex'... the unlikeliest rock'n'roll band in the world have been ten years in the making.
This is their story... ➡

From despair to open-air: Radiohead play to two men unaccompanied by a dog at Sussex University in early 1992 (above). And (right) before a cast of thousands at last year's Glastonbury festival.

TIM GREAVES

HMMN. THE STRANGEST THING THAT has happened to me since we started was..." Scrawny, wiry-haired Thom Yorke pauses for thought, skulking into a disconcerting silence and adopting a vacant, two-thousand-yard stare. For five lengthy minutes he doesn't speak or move. Even the increasingly comic actions of a nearby waiter struggling with a cocktail shaker fail to distract him. Eventually, he looks up. "Hmm. It would have to be the time I got a letter from a convicted murderer. I can't say much more, but basically he said he identified with me. How did it feel? Fuck! Like someone walked over your fucking grave."

THOM YORKE IS THE MOST INFAMOUS Creep in the world. After 'that song' epitomised the mood of '93, from Finland to the Far East, Yorke instantly became "that Creep guy", just like Beck was "the Loser". It seemed to fit – here was an intense, awkward, scatty, nervous, moody, self-professed "flaky twat" with a big mouth, a daft haircut, a degree in Fine Art and Literature and a million-selling debut album to his credit. A creep?

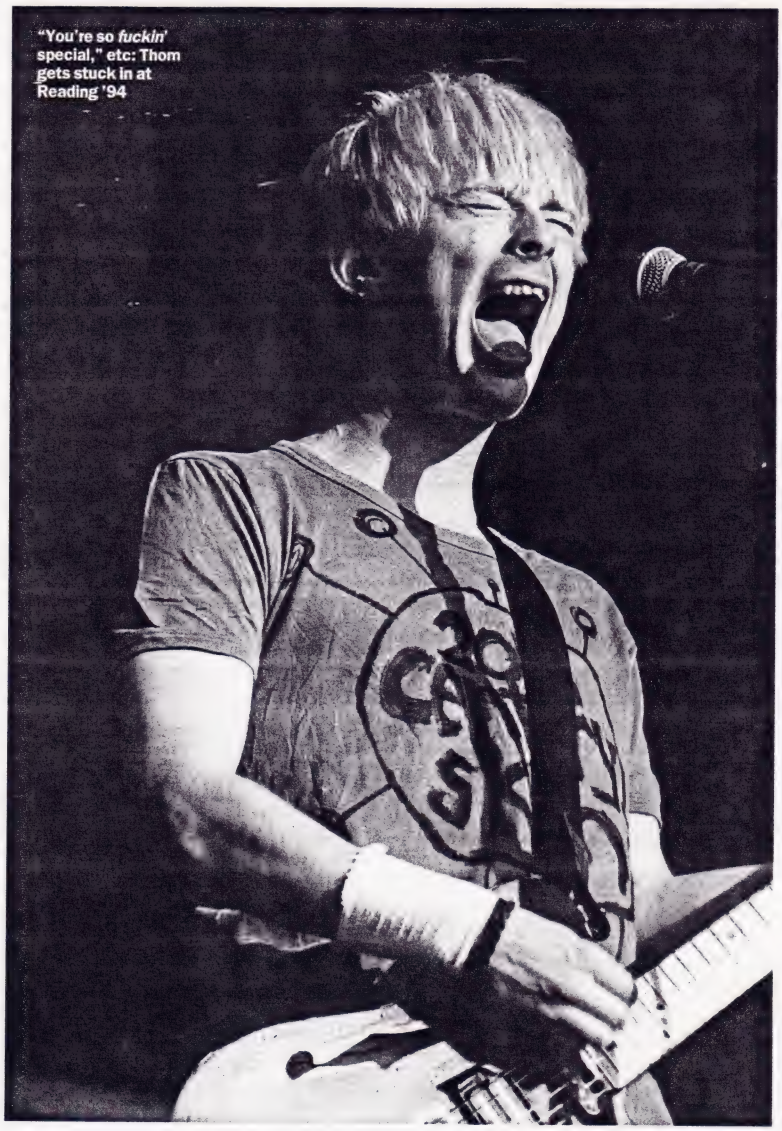
"I always took that song to be a bit of a joke," he says, swigging from a bottle of beer. "The one thing I regret about that song is people identifying me as the creep. Everyone sets me up to be Mr Serious Of Rock which is ridiculous. I used to take myself very seriously, so I suppose I asked for it. Oh well, it could be worse, I could be a Mod, for example."

In March 1993, Thom's first serious musical project, Radiohead, made the Top 30 with their debut album, 'Pablo Honey'. They'd spent five years in private; hanging out, learning, living together and making four-track demos with no desire to commit anything to vinyl. They 'came out' in 1991, changed their name from the somewhat ill-advised and promoter-confusing On A Friday to Radiohead, and incited a three-month record company cheque-book frenzy. Finally they signed to EMI. Despite all this, they were still little more than a promising young indie guitar band with a weird, saturnine frontman, who were overly keen and willing to support everyone from Sultans Of Ping and Kingmaker to James and Dr & The Medics.

In September 1993, exactly one year after it had first appeared to almost universal disinterest, 'Creep' was re-released. This time around, its combination of hesitantly premature guitar chords and Thom's etiolated whine sent it crashing into the Top Ten. The stuttering frustration of the record overcame language barriers everywhere else – they're huge in Egypt, apparently – and they were obliged to extend their seemingly never-ending 'Pablo Honey' tour.

Two years later, on the verge of unleashing their second album, 'The Bends', Radiohead now are proving themselves to be an outstanding, full-on, fully-fledged, rock'n'friggin'roll band. And they did it without Britain's permission. It rarely happens this way. So often our great British exports – The Jam, The Smiths, Suede – end up floundering somewhere in the Atlantic clinging to a mere handful of record sales. But for Radiohead it was different: the Americans chose to embrace and cherish these gangling, small-time English boys and send them home worthy rock stars. Now they have something of the charismatic poutiness and – with 'The Bends' – the songs to be enormous. It no longer seems unlikely that by the middle of next month we could see them stepping out with supermodels, photographed in exotic locations by Anton Corbijn and becoming the epicentre of an intercontinental multi-media circus.

Well, alright, it *does* seem unlikely, but not impossible. Radiohead – the next U2, anyone?



"You're so *fuckin'* special," etc: Thom gets stuck in at Reading '94

REX

Thom was an odd child. He built his own guitar because he wanted to be the next Brian May...

THE FIVE MEMBERS OF RADIOHEAD ALL MET AT A PRIVATE boys' school in Abingdon on the outskirts of Oxford, run by a man Thom maintains was a "power-crazed lunatic who banned music and walked around in robes impersonating a bishop".

Thom Yorke was, unsurprisingly, something of an odd child. When he was eight he was given a small Spanish guitar by his mother. He immediately had a revelation: Yes! A guitar! It was the future! He would be the next Brian May! Fame, adulation and outlandish curly perms would be his! Sadly, all he could play at the time was 'Kumbaya'.

At the age of ten he formed his first 'band': Thom played his ugly homemade electric guitar, while his friend preferred to concentrate on making weird noises by dismantling old TV sets. Intermittently, the TVs would give his sidekick severe electric shocks. Mates would stand around and watch. Two years later, Thom joined the school punk band, TNT, and stepped in front of the microphone for the first time. No one else wanted to be the singer, so he thought he'd try it.

"I started singing into this little stereo mike tied to the end of a broomstick handle. Everyone just started falling about laughing, and that was that. That was my introduction to singing."

Once he realised that the other members of TNT all had bigger mouths and bigger egos than he did, he began stalking the corridors of the school in search of the people to make up his own band.

"I formed it with Ed *(O'Brien, guitarist)* because I thought he was cool and looked like Morrissey; and with Colin *(one half of the Greenwood brothers)* because he was in my year and we always ended up at the same parties. He'd be wearing a beret and a catsuit, or something pretty fucking weird, and I'd be in a frilly blouse and crushed-velvet dinner suit, and we'd pass around the Joy Division records. I sympathised with him for being in TNT after I left, so I told him he could join if he played bass like Peter Hook. He never did."

The first thing Thom ever said to Phil the drummer was, "Can't you play any fucking faster?"

Could you describe what each member of the band is like in three words?

"Probably not."

Alright. Instead of trying to define their personalities, how about imagining what each of them would bring to a party.

"Oh! A game!" Thom rubs his hands together gleefully. "OK. If I had a party and I invited all of them, I'll tell you what they'd bring. Hmmmn. Phil

would bring a large bottle of gin and tonic from Tesco's. Jonny would bring in all his jazz albums. Colin would bring an awful lot of beer and loads of his friends. And Ed would bring his car keys and drive home. Or sit in a corner and skin up. Or both."

He offers up an eager smile. "Does that help? It doesn't really, does it?"

"YES. I DO REMEMBER THE FIRST WORDS THOM ever said to me," laughs Phil Selway, the so-called "binding force of the band", pouring tea into two large mugs in his 'fish-themed' lounge. "I soon learned to play faster."

Phil is quiet, mild-mannered, courteous, softly-spoken and a newly-wed. The band nicknamed him Mad Dog. Sometimes the others will wind up a new producer or engineer by warning them of Phil's perilous unpredictability. How they shouldn't be fooled by his amiable labrador veneer. And how, if you say the wrong thing, he goes completely snooker loopy and throws his drums through windows.

Phil has a degree in English and History, completed a publishing post-grad course and, for a short while, held a job as a desk editor. The oldest member of the band (he was in his last year at school when they all met), Phil's the one responsible for the band's cheque-book. He sees his role not so much as the father figure, but more the band social worker.

At college Thom played in a techno band. Phil played drums in the revue version of Return To The Forbidden Planet...

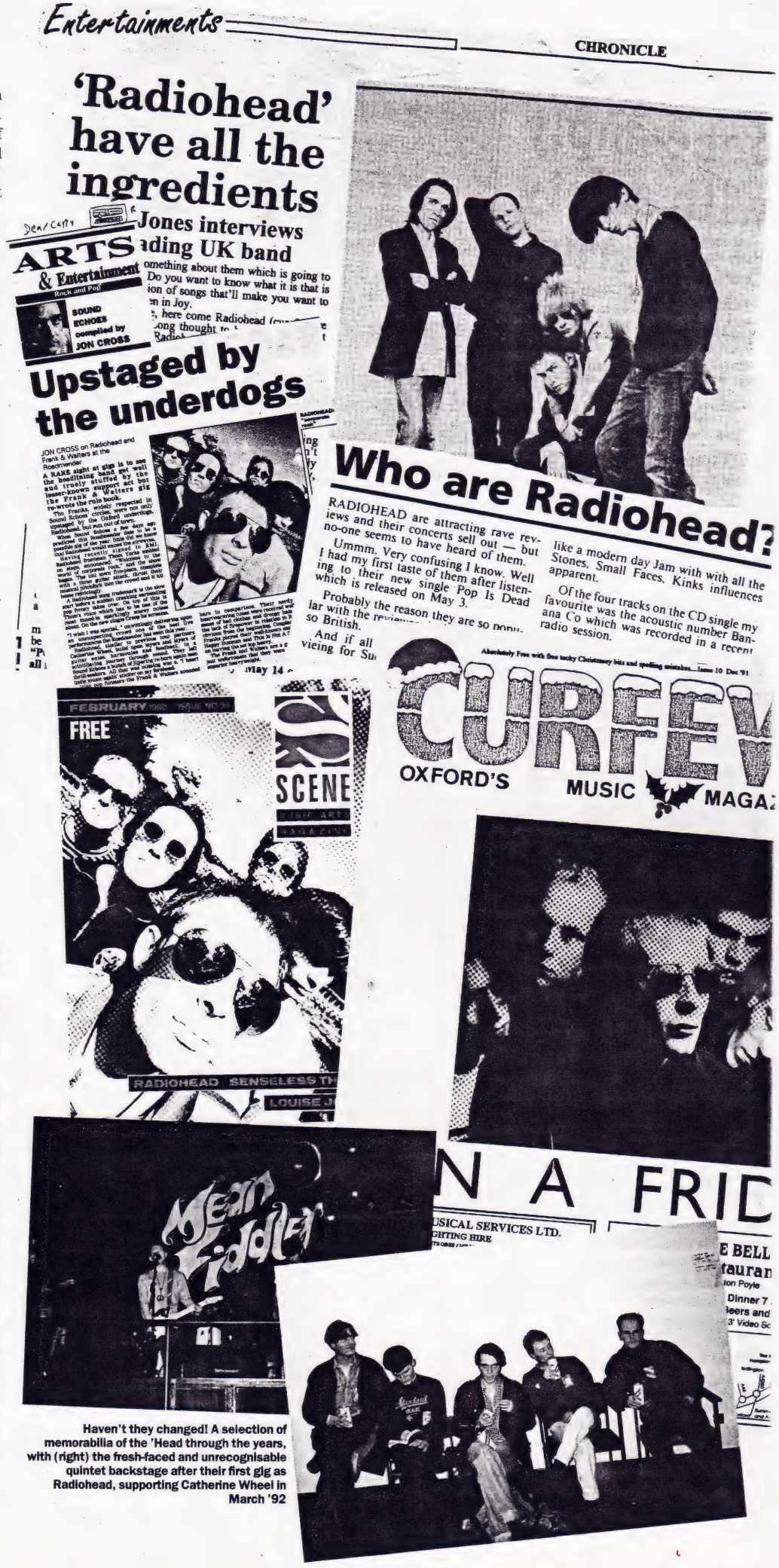
"No, we're all quite civil really," he mumbles pleasantly. "It sounds a bit wet but we all respect each other – of course they all have their little quirks."

Phil learned to play percussion at school, discovered that he was pretty good and decided the "ultimate indulgence" of being in a band was something to aspire to. His parents, like all of the band's parents bar Ed's dad, offered little encouragement and refused to back their academic sons in the pursuit of what they deemed senseless musical idiocy. Thom had to run away and pretend to be staying at a friend's house whenever the band gigged. And the Greenwood brothers, Jonny and Colin, even now have their mother asking them when "all this hideous nonsense is going to stop".

Ed's dad however, is a rare breed, a fanatic – he regularly reads industry magazine *Music Week* from cover to cover.

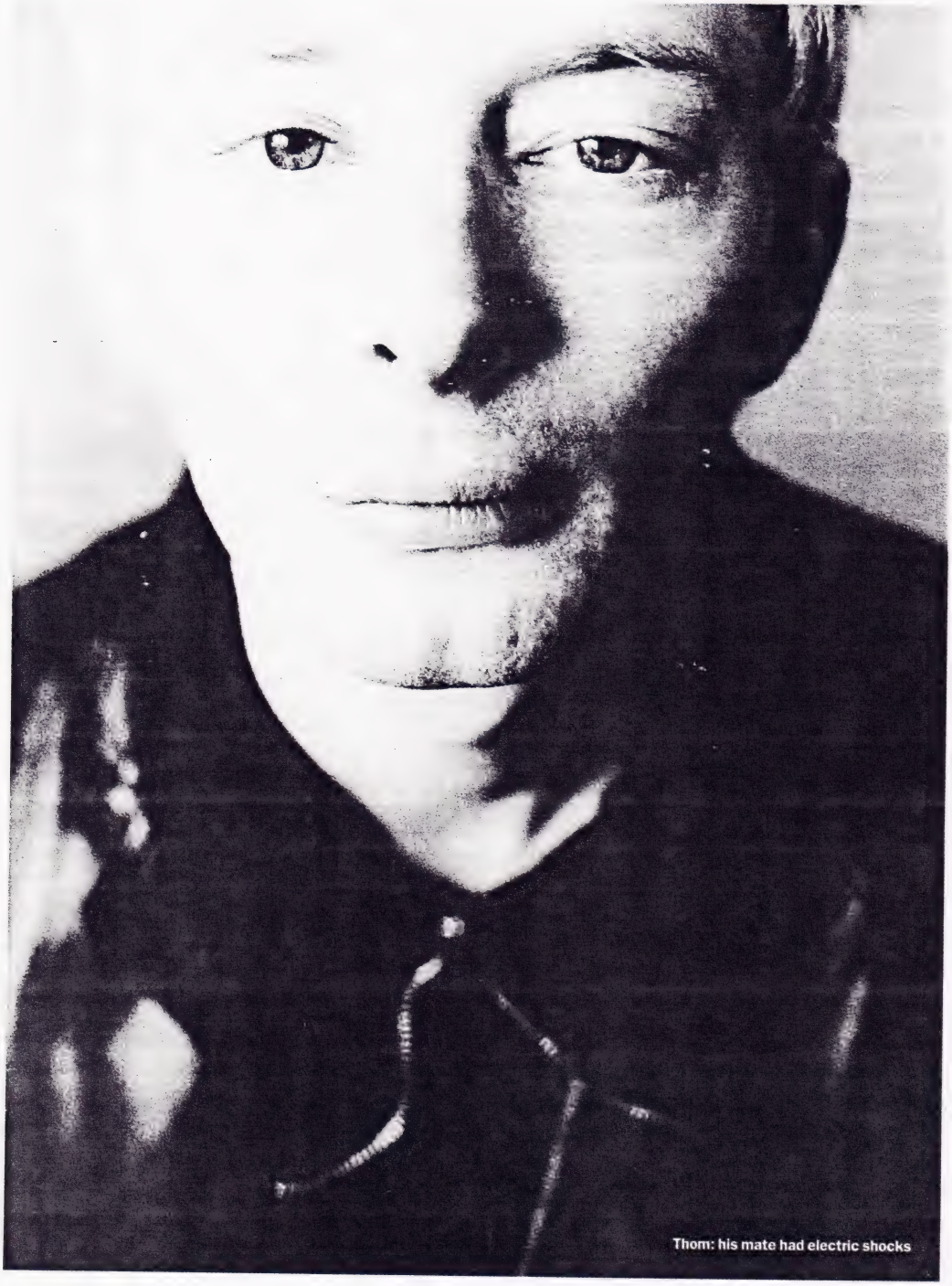
"Ed will come home from a rehearsal," smirks Colin later, at his house, "or touring or whatever, just wanting to relax with a traditional double vodka, and his dad will come in waving the music papers, wanting to discuss the new Primal Scream single."

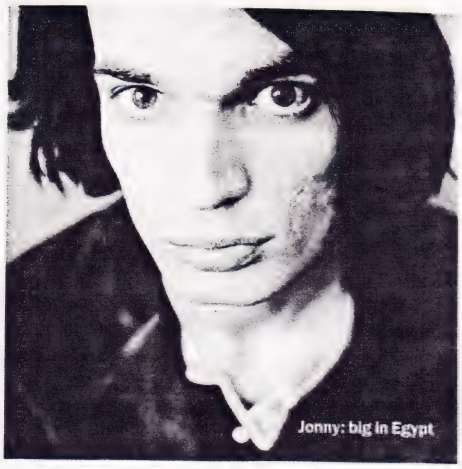
Jonny, crouching on a chair in the kitchen, ➡

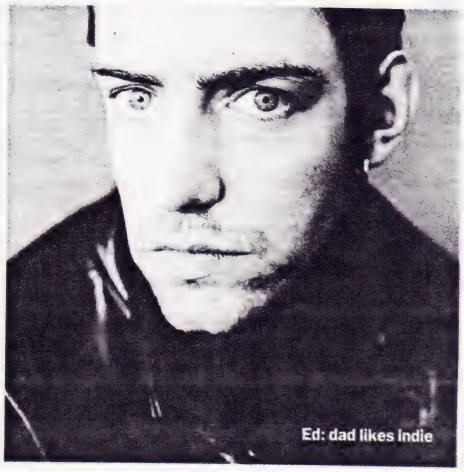


Haven't they changed! A selection of memorabilia of the 'Head through the years, with (right) the fresh-faced and unrecognisable quintet backstage after their first gig as Radiohead, supporting Catherine Wheel in March '92

TIM GREAVES


Thom: his mate had electric shocks


Jonny: big in Egypt


Ed: dad likes indie

nods his head in agreement. Sometimes called the Greenwood sisters because the brothers are so "in tune with their feminine side" there appears to be little sibling rivalry.

"Ah, see," explains Colin. "Unlike the Gallaghers we beat each other up in private and get on very well in public."

Jonny, a jazz fanatic, is the youngest member of the band. He's the one all the girls go for. Although he admits he's a dreadful flirt, he, like the others, says he wouldn't know what to do if a girl seriously began coming on to him.

Thom: "Girls didn't figure in our lives for a long time, going to a boys' school, they didn't really. They were freaks of nature you saw every now and again and wondered how they worked. I think I still feel like that."

For the last couple of years, Jonny's been involved with an Egyptian girl he met while the band was on tour. On one of the visits he makes whenever he can, he was stopped at Egyptian customs and dragged into a small room for a dead-cert all-body-cavities drug search. Mere seconds before the rubber gloves were snapped on, an official burst in and began apologising profusely: "Please forgive us," he begged, "we didn't know who you were..."

And who, wondered the nonplussed Jonny, *was* he exactly? "Why, sir, you're in Radiohead."

"You're a rock axe god," smirks Colin.

"I have an enormous but well-hidden ego."

"Not that well hidden."

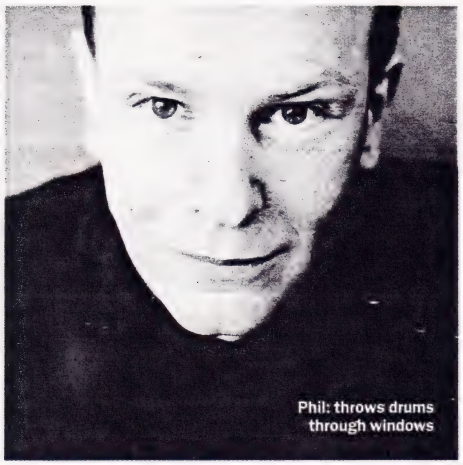
When Jonny was six, he bought Squeeze's 'Cool For Cats' on pink vinyl, and used to sing songs to the dinner ladies. Something of a musical prodigy, he spent his childhood in various orchestras, playing everything from the recorder to jazz guitar, the piano to the viola. He spent a year bugging the band to let him join until, finally, one day Colin called him and told him to bring along his harmonica.

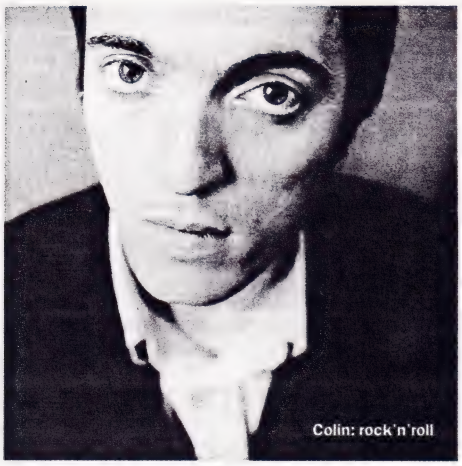
"It was a way of keeping an eye on him," says Colin. "He was only 13, it was a difficult age."

"Yeah," agrees Jonny. "Y'know that awkward embarrassing shuffling phase...which I hope to leave any day now."

A week after his first rehearsal, the band played at their local venue the Jericho Tavern, during which Jonny sat on the side of the stage, eagerly clinging to his harmonica. At last, Thom signalled for him to get up onstage with them. He was in.

Shortly afterwards he bought a keyboard. Now the nascent Radiohead sounded like a cheesy


Phil: throws drums through windows


Colin: rock'n'roll

Talking Heads sixth-form band. Then they hit upon a fantastic new idea: a horn section. They brought in saxophone players, two pretty sisters who responded to jeers with their delicate middle fingers. Then they went to college – all except Jonny, who stayed behind at school. Now they were well on their way to being a well-educated band who met up every once in a while to sound terrible.

They tried to get gigs whenever they could get together. Colin, now at Cambridge University and Peterhouse college ents officer, managed to wangle shows in Cambridge; they treated slots at the Rock Garden in London as chances to have a day out. In the meantime, college offered new opportunities for musical experimentation – at Exeter, Thom played lead guitar in a techno outfit called Flickernoise. In Liverpool, Phil played drums in a college revue version of *Return To The Forbidden Planet*. None of these exploits, of course, was even remotely successful.

When Colin, Phil and Ed left college in the summer of 1990, both the horn section and the encore featuring Elvis Costello's 'Pump It Up' were still an immutable part of On A Friday. By now, the band were not only out-of-step, but off the planet.

After waiting a year for Thom to finish his course, the band regrouped in Oxford in the summer of 1991, and spent their time listening to the Pixies and Lou Reed's 'New York'.

They decided to take this band thing seriously after all. They binned the brass section. They changed their name to Radiohead. Jonny picked up a guitar and within weeks he could play just like Brian May.

Thom: "The bastard."

COLIN GREENWOOD POTTERS ABOUT HIS FARMHOUSE kitchen, making tea and crumpets for everyone. He wears a tatty green gardening jumper. Intermittently, he makes vague and disinterested attempts to wash up. Colin is regarded as the rock'n'roll element of Radiohead.

When he was younger he used to wear make-up and sneak off to Alien Sex Fiend and Fall concerts, and sleep on station benches. After his degree, for nine months before the band were signed, he worked in Our Price to broaden his musical knowledge. He's also considered to be "frighteningly intelligent" by both Phil and Thom. He did his thesis on the writing of Raymond Carver. The victim of an over-active mind, he suffers greatly from insomnia.

"I suppose I'm the most gregarious member of the band because I don't like spending time alone. I like having meals with friends and staying up late drinking. Hardly rock 'n' roll. But what is? Pissing in hotel rooms? Doing cocaine? I used to share a room with Ed on tour until he refused to. I kept on waking him up at all hours of the morning. So I had a room to myself, which was a shame because Ed's very entertaining. He talks in his sleep – actually it's more like sleep shouting. He starts having conversations that you just wish you could hear the other half of. He sometimes does accents too. He once came out with this thick Irish brogue, started shouting 'HELP! THE BUILDING'S ON FIRE... AND TERRY WOGAN'S UP THERE'. It was hilarious."

"Ed gets home from rehearsal, and his dad will be there waving Music Week, wanting to talk about the new Primal Scream single..." – Colin

Colin jokes about his background, says it was like the Von Trapp family, only his mother was tone deaf. In fact his family are all very close. His big sister introduced him to Magazine, Joy Division and John Cooper Clarke. The brothers also lovingly joke about their mother. "Jonathan often teases her about all the drug benders he goes on, and she sits there saying, Oh yes? How nice dear. It was funny, when we first got signed she wouldn't tell our grandfather what we were doing because she thought it would finish him off."

"She is quite proud of us I suppose," adds Jonny. "Her favourite song on the first LP was 'Thinking About You' which has the line *'I'm playing with myself'*, she had no idea it was about wanking. I remember one time she was doing the *Independent* crossword and she called over, 'Jonathan, four down, a female bird, do you think it could be c***?' I was like, erm, how are you spelling that mother?"

Jonny is the only member of the band not to have a degree. He dropped out of his Psychology and Music course in favour of the band, much to Ed's annoyance.

"I remember him asking me if I was sure about what I was doing," laughs Jonny. "He was trying to oust me! I could see him, sharpening his plectrum behind his back."

"Having three guitarists," says Thom, "there's a lot of competition – who's going to come up with the best line first. Jonny always wins."

Before the band signed, Thom and Jonny spent all their time writing songs on a four-track (Colin came in once to add some shouty backing vocals and accidentally wiped the tape). Or they'd go out busking together, until it became too depressing.

"Tramps started throwing two pences at us, and we knew the only way we'd make money was if we played REM songs. Oh yes and one time *(Jonny's eyes light up)* Ride, who were big local stars, walked passed and actually stopped to listen... Well, erm, it wasn't that much of a big thing."

Just before Christmas, the two of them recreated those glorious busking days, this time showcasing the new album in front of 2,500 excited fans, at The Beacon Theatre in New York.

NOW YOU'VE COME SO FAR, DO YOU EVER FEEL YOU MIGHT get swallowed up in the ludicrousness of it all?

"Nah," says Thom confidently. "Nah...well... maybe."

Who's in charge?

"Hmmn," he ponders . "We operate like the UN; *you* can get the veto, but *I'm* definitely America."

Radiohead have now been together ten years. 'The Bends', although only their second LP, sounds so accomplished, full-bodied and un-indie that it could easily be their sixth album. After the alarming success of their debut and the two-year promotional tour that followed, the pressures surrounding 'Pablo Honey"s successor very nearly split them up.

"Was I freaked out?" gasps Thom. "I couldn't have been more freaked out. If we hadn't have pulled this record off I would have given it all up. It has got to be the hardest thing I've ever, ever done."

As it was, they had problems. They spent two months in a recording studio in St John's Wood, feeling intimidated about committing anything to tape. They sat around for days doing nothing. If anyone played a note Thom'd say, "That sounds crap, shut up" so they'd sit around some more.

"We had days of painful self-analysis, a total fucking meltdown for two fucking months."

The man who had to hang around and wait for them to feel inspired was producer John Leckie. Somewhat familiar with this situation, having waited five years for The Stone Roses to get it together, he ordered everyone to go home except Thom, told him to sit down and "just fucking play it". He did, it worked, the band relocated to Abbey Road Studios and the album "fell out" in just under three weeks.

"I don't want to set this album up as being precious because it's not, that's why it worked. It's so fucking good because we had so much to prove. The confidence level was pretty low but, despite that, things started falling into place. There was a time when I didn't think it would happen. I thought we'd killed ourselves off. As for my lyrics, I think the best way to explain them is to say that I made them all up, it's all lies. That way people might stop writing me all these fucking weird letters."

Thom, now the LP's finished how do you feel?

"Pretty fucking good," he smiles, holding up his beer in a celebratory fashion. "I listened to it for weeks, every day. I'd put it on really loud and run around the house, manically, waving my arms and shouting, EETS ALIVE!" S

FREE TAPE The killer movie soundtrack!

VOX

April 1995 £2

REM down under

SIMPLE MINDS

WEEZER

RADIOHEAD

Splashdown for the new U2

Radiohead, REM, Simple Minds, Weezer, Fashion, Tarantino, Morrissey

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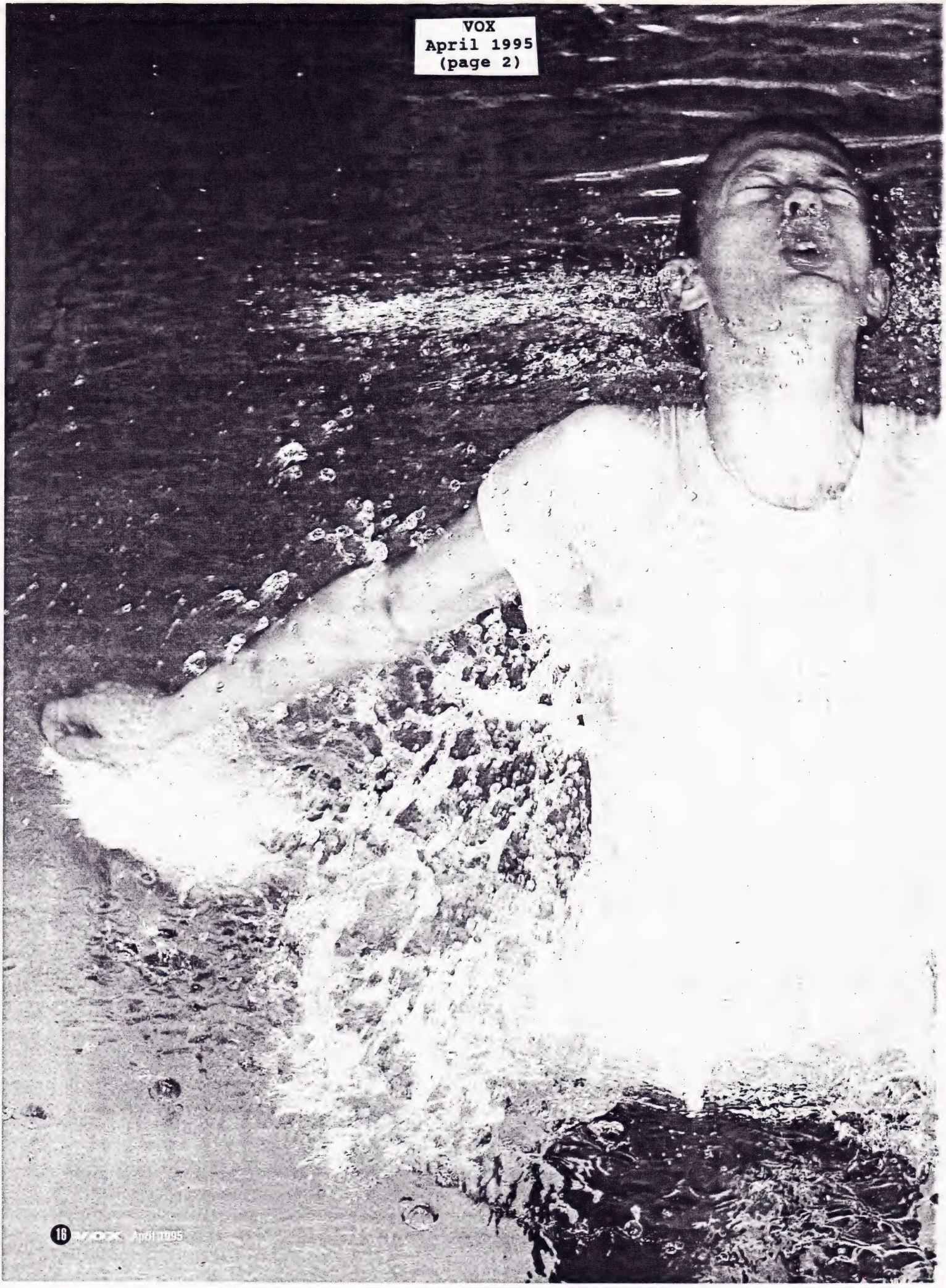

VOX
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Scuba do

Despite conquering America with the anthem to self-loathing, 'Creep', Radiohead found that success didn't bring them any respect in their home country. The band were under pressure and it gave them *The Bends*, the first great British rock album of the year...

In an Oxfordshire health club Radiohead's singer Thom Yorke forces one more mid-air leap out of his skinny, frail-looking body. For a moment, the flailing limbs suggest the contorted energy of the band's live shows, before he falls back wearily into the eight-foot-deep pool.

Over the past two years, Thom's life has been torn between manic strength and limp inactivity. For the sick-looking 26-year-old, the shift from relentless touring to 'a lazy time in my flat when I just let everything go' was not only emotionally difficult, but actually left his body paralysed with a painful physical disorder. 'My joints had become hyper-mobile on tour and when I stopped working like that they just seized up. My whole body was aching like I was an old man.'

As Thom's five-foot-five body 'slumps on' a redundant towing machine, the lyrics of the band's self-loathing anthem 'Creep' are given a fresh ironic twist. '*I don't care if it hurts/I want to have control/I want a perfect body*,' he sang in 1992. It's easy to imagine the singer squinting at the lean, muscular bodies around him and sneering: '*You're special/You're so fucking special/But I'm a creep*.'

By **Steve Malins**
Pictures by **Derek Ridgers**

Radiohead are the awkward, ungainly misfits of the English music scene who express their insecurities with such force that, at their most extreme, they've touched a chord among the residents of Death Row. Thom shifts uneasily as he admits: "I don't want to set myself up like that again; I've had letters from Death Row, guys who have killed people, and they're responding to the lyrics on 'Creep'. That really fucking scared the hell out of me."

Guitarist Jonny Greenwood, who is sprawled alongside an empty Jacuzzi, also acknowledges that "the nature of the band does attract a lot of those kind of people. We do meet a lot of people who aren't very articulate."

Radiohead's new album, *The Bends*, probes into dark, introspective territory with greater intensity than their debut, *Pablo Honey*, which often lost its venom in rock posturing. Musically, *The Bends* is a taut but powerful album, spewing out Thom's lyrics with a fierce directness that is badly lacking in the arty minimalism of contemporaries like The Auteurs or Brett Anderson's second-hand romanticism. Certainly the stresses created by the massive success of 'Creep' in the States have fuelled some of the songs.

However, these experiences have brought the band's own doubts and lack of confidence into sharper focus, rather than turning the whole record into a self-indulgent rant against fame. Thom avoids songs about idealised relationships and 'LA Woman'-styled rock'n'roll fantasies, cutting right to the bone on the anatomical-sounding tracks like 'My Iron Lung', 'The Bends' and 'Bones'. As Jonny says: "It's a real medical album for me. Thom went into a hospital to take pictures for the cover artwork, and it struck me the other day how much it's all about illness and doctors. It kind of makes sense, because we've all been on a cycle of illness. I've been rundown with gastro-somethings, horrible things with Latin names that are attached to my lower intestines..." he says, adding perversely, "which is great.

"There's also that feeling of revulsion about your own body; that resentment that you're so reliant on it. Just looking at your hands all the time and seeing all the bones. Urgh."

For the singer, his sense of frustration with the limitations of his body is rooted in more than hippy paranoia.

"When I was born, my left eye was completely paralysed," he says, propped up against the chrome of the fitness machine. "My eyelid was permanently shut and they thought it would be like that for the rest of my life. Then some specialist bloke realised he could graft a muscle in, like a bionic eye. So I had five major operations between the age of nought and six.

"They fucked up the last one and I went half blind. I can kind of see. I can judge if I'm going to hit something, but that's just about it. They made me go around with a patch on my eye for a year, saying: 'Oh well, it's just got lazy through all the operations,' which was crap because they'd just damaged it. The first operation I had, I was just learning to speak, and apparently I asked: 'What have I got?' I didn't know. I woke up and I had this huge thing on my eye, and according to my parents, I just doubled up and started crying."

The singer's problems got worse, however, as he grew older and more self-aware.

"The only thing that affected me really badly was walking around with a patch on my eye for a year, with everybody taking the piss out of me. I was starting to become more self-conscious and that was about the worst thing that anybody could possibly have done, especially as my family moved twice in six months. It meant that I had to face a new classroom, where, unlike my old school friends, they weren't used to the problems I was having with my eye."

This feeling of being an outsider is still with him as he finds himself in the position of being a spokesman for society's freaks, a marketable pop star/songwriter for corporate America and an easy target for media cynicism and music industry back-stabbing in England. He's fighting to get across his own ideas on all three fronts, but it's hard work, and he often ends up sounding confused and stand-offish.

Thom's attempts to deflect from his own personality through more oblique lyrics have largely failed. Although the songs are not as openly personal as those of Sinéad O'Connor or Courtney Love, Jonny hints at the truth when he says: "All Thom's songs eventually come down to how he's feeling." The mustard-haired frontman insists that "I don't think we always write about fraught anxieties", and then gives up with a shrug: "Well, I'm trying not to."

Thom's position as an MTV icon is also a source of confused resistance. The fame of 'Creep' has created its own strange notoriety, for which he is usually the focus. The band's other guitarist, Ed O'Brien—the only band member whose physique actually fits in with the healthy surroundings—recalls how "people

Creepy guys (l-r): Colin Greenwood, Ed O'Brien, Phil Selway, Jonny Greenwood and Thom Yorke

come up to Thom and say: 'Hey, aren't you the 'Creep' guy?' You can see he's about to react, and that's where we all leap in, wave our arms around and go: 'Yeah, man, we're the 'Creep' guys.'" In the band's new promo video for the single, 'High And Dry', Thom has tried to reclaim this monster for himself by wearing one of the American promotional badges, which declares, "I Am A Creep". This confident assertion that the song belongs to him is partly explained by the huge promotional budget on offer from the band's US label, Capitol, which promises to blast away the shadow of 'Creep' and establish the band as an album-based, long-term proposition. Radiohead's manager, Chris Hufford, reveals that the label boss, Gary Gersh, "is completely into us and has us as a priority act". However, he also confesses that Gersh's "hands-on approach" may undermine the band's current confidence if he tries to steer them too far in his own direction.

For the moment, Thom has retained a firm grip over how the band is represented by working on all the artwork himself. He's also happy with the videos and choice of singles, but if they fail to achieve the commercial breakthrough that Capitol expects of them, the situation is likely to deteriorate rapidly. As Chris says, with managerial diplomacy: "A lot of American executives speak a different language. They're not completely truthful."

Jonny is also wary of placing too much faith in Capitol's support: "There was even talk of the Americans not releasing the second album at one stage. This was before they heard it. We were just kind of discounting America pretty much, because they had us down as a pop act. Now we have record company bigwigs ringing us up and telling us how we should be doing things, which is worse, in a way."

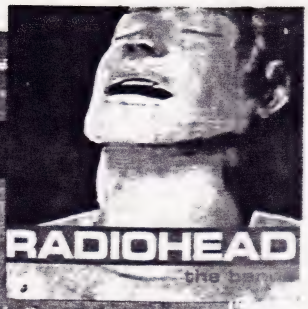
Meanwhile, Thom tears into the "incestuous" nature of the British music industry with all the zeal and bitterness of a discredited heretic. "Other bands really wind me up. I'm very competitive and antagonistic. I just hate meeting other bands. I read this quote from Portishead about the *NME*'s Brat Awards and the guy [Geoff Barrow] said: 'I don't know what I'm doing here really; it's just a lot of indie bands drinking loads of beer and shouting at each other across the tables.' And that's exactly why I don't like it. The British music scene is so insular, so petty and so fucking bitchy I just don't want to have any contact with it. That's why we've never moved to London. If we did, that would be it. We'd last a month and then split up."

He sums up his current two-fingered stance by stating: "It doesn't bother me that we're not accepted in England. I'm rather hoping that we stay like this for a few years. I think we've got the biggest fanbase in Britain and ultimately I don't really give a fuck. In a bloody-minded way, I hope we're left alone. I thrive on being an outsider. I think the worst thing that could happen is if a British music paper put us on the cover saying that we're the best band in Britain. "Although," he adds with a smile, "it's not very likely that will happen."

> "Other bands really wind me up. I'm very antagonistic. I just hate meeting other bands."

When Steve Wright read out, during his Radio 1 afternoon show, a report in London's *Evening Standard* headlined "British Pop Unknowns Storm USA" he unwittingly reinforced a false picture of Radiohead's career. Before 'Creep' reached the Top 40 in the States, they'd already charted with two singles and an album that had peaked at 25 in their home country (it was later awarded a gold disc). Although hardly spectacular, they were making a bigger commercial impression than some of their much-touted contemporaries, such as The Auteurs and Stereolab. This confusion continued to affect them through 1993, as the Top Ten placing of 'Creep' at home was dismissed as a one-off achievement made on the back of the song's reputation in the US. As a result, the release of 'My Iron Lung' last year again met with blank-eyed hostility, despite their fanbase taking it to 24 in the British charts without radio support.

To make matters worse, the band's attempts to send-up their success in the States only backfired on them. They began to present themselves as ➤



CHECK YOUR 'HEAD

Thom Yorke comes up for air after recording *The Bends*...

1 Planet Telex "I was off my head when I did it. It was four o'clock in the morning and John Leckie said: 'We've got to do the vocal now.' Ed remembers it more, but apparently I sang it all with my head on the floor because I couldn't stand up. I was bent double and I hadn't a clue what I was singing."

2 The Bends "We wrote this song before we finished the first album. The sound at the beginning comes from this caterwauling mayhem outside this hotel in the States. There was this guy training these eight-year-old kids, who were parading up and down with all these different instruments. The guy had this little microphone on his sweater and was going: 'Yeah, keep it up, keep it up.' So I ran out and taped it."

3 High And Dry "It's a demo we did two years ago. We'd all completely forgotten about it and then someone dug it up and said: 'Hey, listen to this.' We had to go into rehearsal and completely re-learn it. It has this real naive charm that offsets everything else."

4 Fake Plastic Trees "Last night I was called by the American record company insisting, well almost insisting, that we used a Bob Clearmountain mix of it. I said: 'No way.' All the ghost-like keyboard sounds and weird strings were completely gutted out of his mix, like he'd gone in with a razor blade and chopped it all up. It was horrible."

5 Bones "We recorded this about four times before we got it right. The original had the ending going on for about a minute and a half, which was something Jonny got from The Fall."

6 Nice Dream "We all debuted playing acoustic guitar on that in a sort of cosmic Kumbaya outside in the sunshine. There's this awful photograph of us all sitting on a lawn with headphones on. The lyrics came out of a half-drunk dream I had, one of those where you don't really sleep properly. It's about our relationship with people generally."

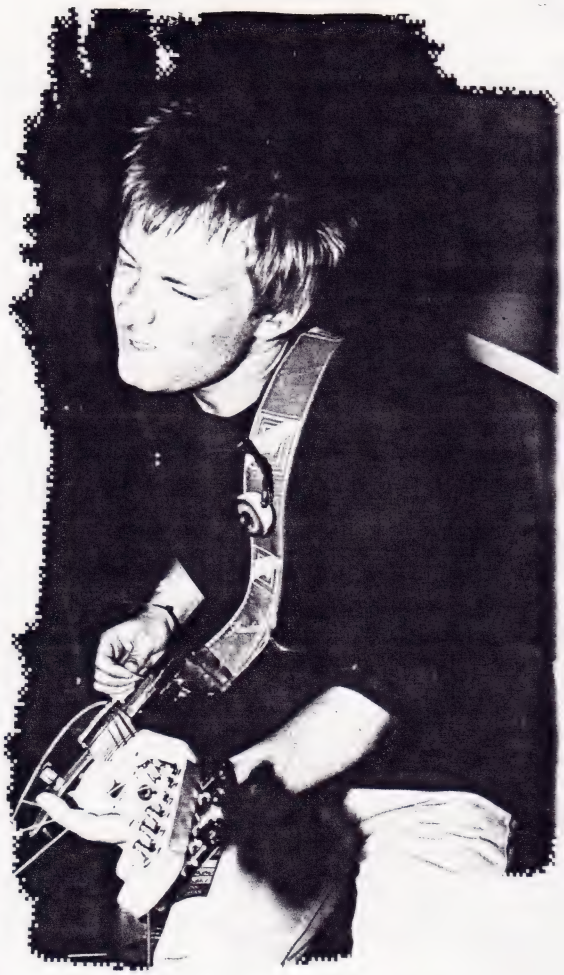
7 Just (Do It Yourself) "I love the really high notes at the end, which don't even sound like a guitar. I went away from the studio for a day and Jonny worked on it. When I came back and heard what he'd done, I thought it was the most exciting thing I've ever heard us come up with on tape."

8 My Iron Lung "We had a year on tour from our first recording session that [illegible] particularly heavy [illegible]"

10 Black Star "My favourite thing about this song is [illegible] comes in on the end of us. It was [illegible] because it sounds like it's [illegible] Jonny was going [illegible]"

12 Sleep [illegible]

"All that tea-drinking stuff is complete bollocks, obviously. The joke wore thin."



tea-drinking English fops, "low on testosterone" but enthusiastic about playing bridge. This only served to emphasise their college-boy pasts (they all went to university or poly) and suggested further comparisons to The Fixx, a pompous, middle-class act in the '80s who were big in the States but were never taken seriously in their own country.

Thom winds up for another attack, half exasperated at the band's own folly as he snaps: "Well, all that tea-drinking stuff is complete bollocks, obviously. We were trying to keep it as a joke, but the joke wore thin because it didn't have any basis in reality at all. The reality is that we were probably doing as many drugs as everybody else. I wouldn't go on a chat show and talk about it, because it's purely recreational. I love getting stoned, it's the best thing in the fucking world. We put together a lot of this album when we were stoned... Shit, I've said it now."

He sounds uncomfortable and unconvincing as he continues: "I go through phases of drinking myself into the ground. I'm just one of those people who binges. I did last week in Los Angeles; I was drinking all the time."

Ed O'Brien admits that Radiohead are "inherently middle-class" and this affable man from a "medical family" also owns up to a "holier than thou attitude" when on tour. After a gig in Dallas two years ago, this side of his nature came to the fore.

"This absolutely beautiful girl comes up and says: 'My parents are away; do you want to come back with me and do loads of coke?' I didn't have a girlfriend at the time and we had a day off the next day, but I was just flabbergasted. I was very polite, but I thought of us as a very moral band and I said 'no' because I wasn't sure what the others would think of me."

The flipside to this gentlemanly reaction to rock culture shock was a crippling confusion within the band as to how to make their next move.

Despite being friends since school, by the start of 1994, Radiohead were barely communicating with each other as they tried to retain a stiff upper lip and bottled-up the doubts that they were all feeling. This was made all the more horrific because they only had each other. They neither liked nor trusted the entourages that grew around them as they moved from city to city, a feeling that is captured in 'The Bends' when Thom sings: *'We don't have any real friends.'*

"That represents how we felt, yes", says Jonny. "There is a sense of isolation being in Radiohead."

The situation came to a head when they started their first recording sessions for *The Bends* at RAK studios in London. "I could tell we'd held everything in because there wasn't enough energy there", says Thom. "We were all crawling around the studio, not walking around. We were really scared of our instruments. That might sound over-dramatic, but that's how it felt. It must have been tortuous to watch. I know it was very hard on our producer John Leckie, who didn't know what the fuck was going on. We'd be going to him: 'So what do you think? What shall we do? He was like: 'Well, I don't know, it's up to you. You can do what the fuck you like, just do it rather than sit there thinking about it.'"

The band cite this period as their worst since forming in 1991, although Jonny's description of an "insidious and depressing" time is lifted by drummer Phil Selway's comic sense of English restraint. He sums up the band's implosion as "a time when the in-band communication just went to pot", aptly illuminating some of the problems that the band had in talking openly with each other.

When Radiohead left RAK, they came away with a few recordings that, if released, would have set them up for universal ridicule as aspiring stadium pomp-rockers.

"We had one song that had loads of strings and heavy guitars. It was very epic and sounded like Guns N' Roses' 'November Rain'," says Ed. "By this time, Thom was trying to shut off from everything. There was a lot of pressure for us to make a loud, bombastic record," he grimaces, "and all I ever wanted to do was the exact opposite."

In the end, the unhinged excitement of last year's tour in Mexico proved the catalyst for a change in direction and attitude, as they rediscovered the raw enthusiasm that had fuelled *Pablo Honey*. When they returned to England, they recorded the rest of the album in two weeks, and only retained live and demo versions of 'My Iron Lung' and 'High And Dry' from the earlier sessions.

The band are fiercely proud of *The Bends*, but Thom is psyching himself up for another face-off with Radiohead's critics.

"If the music doesn't go beyond our own experiences, then the whole point of making this record is lost," he declares. "It there's one thing I can see people slagging us off for, it's that, but that's because they're not listening to the music. People have defined our emotional range with that one song, 'Creep'. I saw reviews of 'My Iron Lung' that said it was just like 'Creep'. When you're up against things like that, it's like: 'Fuck you.' These people are never going to listen." VOX

REVIEW

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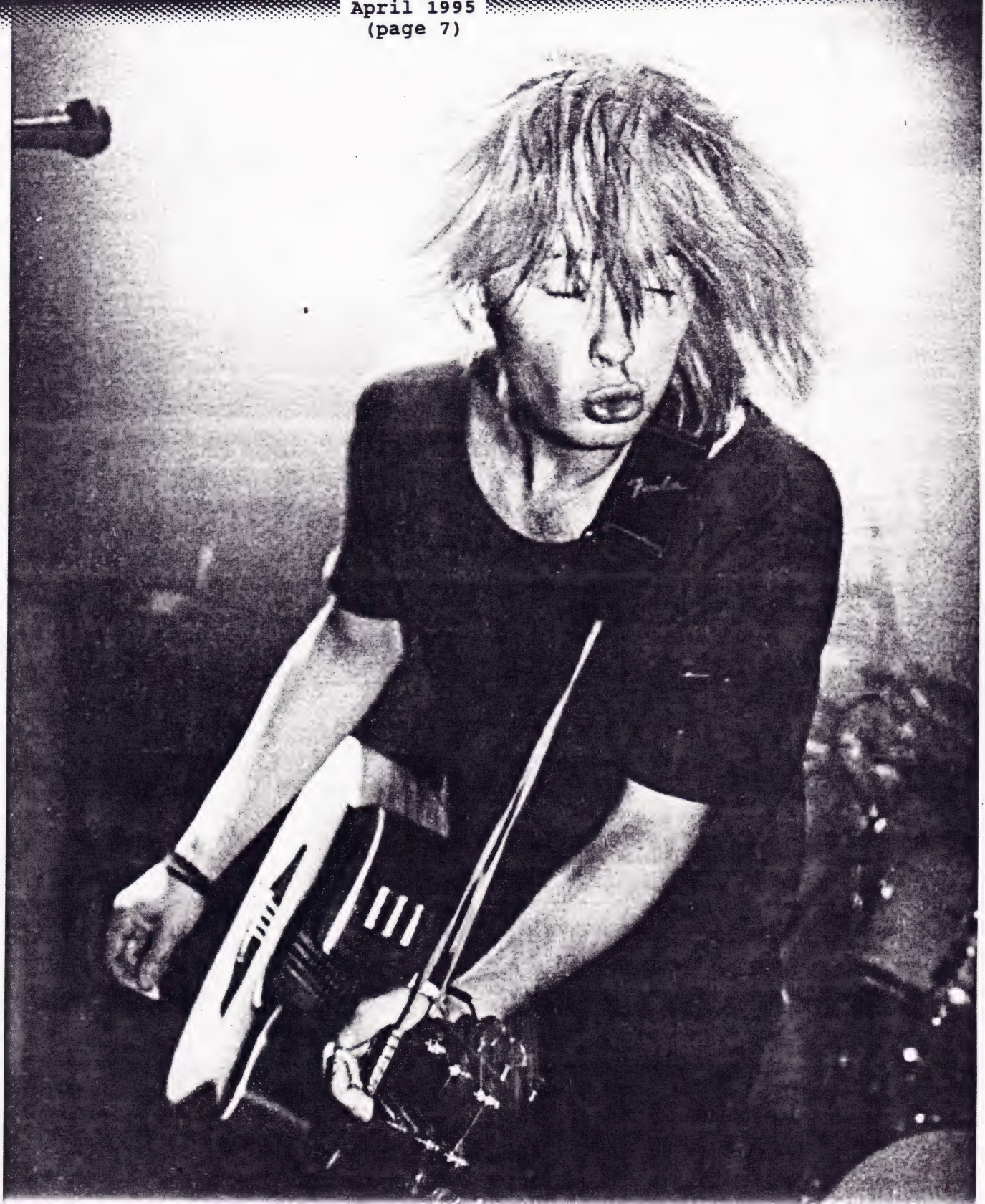

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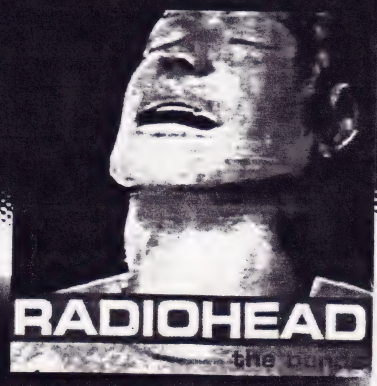
ALBUMS OF THE MONTH



RADIOHEAD
The Bends
(Parlophone TPS7372)

This time last year, there was abject fear in the Radiohead camp. The band were in Micky Most's Rak studios in London, in the middle of a projected nine-week recording session. A European tour with James at the end of 1993 had more or less wound up the protracted touring in support of their debut album, *Pablo Honey*. May and June would see them sally forth one more time, in a final effort to wring some 'Creep'-led sales from the indie kids and post-modern rockers of the Far East, Australia and New Zealand. But sandwiched in the middle, they had to make the follow-up to the 1.1 million-selling, unexpected success of their debut. And Radiohead lost the plot.

They found themselves wallowing for four days on one song. The naivete and enthusiasm that had allowed them to rush through the making of *Pablo Honey* in three weeks was gone. Their confidence was shot to pieces. "It was too thought out, it lost a lot of spontaneity," remembers guitarist Ed O'Brien. Radiohead almost imploded. The sessions were a week behind schedule. Touring commitments loomed. Things were not looking good. Producer John Leckie, who'd already seen the heart of darkness with The Stone Roses, must have been thinking: 'Why me?'

So Radiohead abandoned ship, went back on the road and rediscovered their purpose. On stage Down Under, they were reminded of the energy and ferocity of their live incarnation. They came home, junked the Rak Sessions, went back to Oxford and recorded an album in two weeks. Out of the pressure came *The Bends*.

Despite—or, more likely, because of—the fraught circumstances of its genesis, *The Bends* is a remarkable achievement. Taut, fierce, scared and scary, it is the sound of humdrum rock lashed into brilliance by one man's howling turmoil and one band's grasp of light and shade. Out of context, last autumn's single 'My Iron Lung' appeared dull and plodding, a dense racket unleavened by the whipcracking zip of 'Anyone Can Play Guitar' or the brattish pop suss that made a world-beating legend of 'Creep'. But the fact that this, the track they chose as their back-from-the-brink single, was recorded live at The Astoria in London tells you something about the new Radiohead. No messing, no fussing, just playing to their strengths as a great live band.

Here in *The Bends*, 'My Iron Lung' comes alive, slotting perfectly into the album's slew of fucked-up and fucked-off tirades. The band claim much of the imagery stems from illness, from the catalogue of colds, bugs, exhaustion, stress and abuse they endured in their long months on the road. More specifically, Thom Yorke points the finger at the bubble he and the band found themselves inhabiting after going from zeroes to heroes in a few short months. "*Where do we go from here, the words are coming out all weird?*" he sings on the title track. "*Who are my real friends?*"

Of course, songs about the drag of touring the world, taking drugs, trashing top hotels and being adored by teenage Japanese pop fans are crushingly boring. Radiohead's strength is that they turn their downer on their world into something stridently uplifting. 'The Bends' packs a mighty crunch, its torrid guitars straining at the leash. 'Fake Plastic Trees', wherein Yorke appears to bemoan the superficiality of the world, finds depths in artifice. The irony-heavy 'Nice Dream', meanwhile, is perhaps the quintessential Radiohead song. Yorke sings like a little boy lost, the band strum and chorus quietly in the background, flashes of strings peer through the mix and the elegant whole is thrown into sudden chaos by the appearance of a starburst of guitar fireworks.

Here, and on 'Just' and 'Black Star', Radiohead spark and fizz and sound like they've listened to Queen's '70s titans, *A Good Day At The Races* and *A Night At The Opera*. Which, honestly, is a good thing. For the neatest example of the new assurance in the Radiohead camp, though, look to a pair of songs on side two. 'Bulletproof' proves that, if all else fails, Radiohead have a future writing AOR ballads it's OK to like for the American rock'n'soul gerontocracy. 'My Iron Lung' proves that Jonny Greenwood is a six-string alchemist of the rarest breed and that Radiohead are one of our rawest, realest rock contenders. And listening back to the makeweight cock-rockers that clogged up *Pablo Honey*, and thinking back to their difficult 1994, who'd have ever imagined that? **8**

Craig McLean

RADIOHEAD

LIVE

DAILY NEWS
SEVENTY-FIVE YEARS
JUNE 26, 1919
NEW YORK'S HOMETOWN NEWSPAPER
JUNE 3, 1995

CONCERT REVIEW

Radiohead's Creepy Frequency

By JIM FARBER
Daily News Staff Writer

SINGERS PRETENDING TO BE disillusioned freaks are a dime a dozen in rock 'n' roll. But every so often there crawls from the abyss a figure of such clear and convincing weirdness one can only bow in awe.

Thom Yorke of Radiohead is such a creature. At Tramps on Thursday, Yorke twisted himself into a perfect vision of cowering alienation. With his pinched features, stooped posture and contorted expressions, the singer looked like the Edvard Munch painting "The Scream" come to life. At other times, he appeared like a caged animal, ready to strike.

Yorke's lyrics upped the rage. "I want to be part of the human race," he sang at the start of the show, yelping as if that goal were unrealizable.

Such a wretched outburst makes sense coming from a band that made its name two years ago with a hit called "Creep." Between Yorke's disturbed vocals and lyrics — and the music's serrated guitars — the song makes chillingly clear the connection between worshiping another person and loathing oneself — between exaltation and contempt.

As celebrated as the single may be live, Radiohead buried it in the middle of their set. That did them no harm considering how much strong material they have at their disposal. To maintain momentum, they did have to rely on older songs from their 1993 debut, "Pablo Honey." It's a far brisker, more animated work than the new "The Bends."

On older numbers like "Anyone Can Play Guitar," the band got to prove they can rock as convincingly as Yorke can complain. With their epic guitar style — and their way with a tune — Radiohead came off a bit like U2 gone dissolute.

Certainly, Yorke owns as strong an instrument as Bono. At times, he achieved an operatic whininess. In concert, it was hard not to admire how naked and unashamedly pained Yorke could be, especially given his riveting anti-charisma.

Combined with the moody music, Yorke offered little fun and no humor in the set. But the band still managed to evoke a weird excitement, if only through the sheer sad purity of their vision.

CALENDAR

Los Angeles Times

SATURDAY, JUNE 17, 1995

CREEPING UP: It would be natural to assume that Radiohead would take the stage with the same ethereal attitude it displays on record and in videos, which is why the English quintet's gritty, down-to-earth set at the Palace was such a pleasant surprise. Reviewed by Sandy Masuo. **F4**

Radiohead on a Raucous New Wavelength at Palace

POP MUSIC REVIEWS

In promotional photos and videos, Radiohead's singer Thom Yorke frequently comes off like some ethereal, sprite-like cousin of Björk. The band's two albums are laced with a dreamy sense of melody that holds together the lyrics' *Angst*. The video for "Fake Plastic Trees" features Yorke in a shopping cart rocketing through a surreal supermarket, like David Bowie's Major Tom lost in a suburban grocery store rather than outer space.

It would be natural to assume that the English quintet would take the stage with the same attitude, which is why the gritty, down-to-earth set it delivered at the Palace on Thursday was such a pleasant surprise. The layers of edgy but tidy guitars that fill its albums became a wonderfully dynamic, often raucous setting for Yorke's equally dynamic vocals and bittersweet sentiments.

The ensemble, which made an alternative-rock splash with "Creep" in 1993, flared into sawing power-chord assaults, then settled into pulsing, plucking, strumming calms while Yorke negotiated passages of evocative mumbling and delicately melancholy falsetto. The singer was as captivating to watch as he was to hear, running through a fascinating gamut of deliberate poses and spontaneous outbursts.

On the surface, Radiohead may seem to be just another outfit in the British guitar-pop micro-invasion, but there's more to them than meets the eye.

—SANDY MASUO

THE Hollywood REPORTER Monday, June 19, 1995

Concert review

Radiohead

The Palace, Hollywood
Thursday, June 15

By Marc Pollack

Touring in support of its second full-length Capitol Records release, Oxford, England's Radiohead has matured, building on the angst and moodiness established on its gold debut, "Pablo Honey."

Written off by many as one-hit wonders after the anthem "Creep" broke big, Radiohead regrouped and redirected energy into further developing its somewhat derivative sound.

Well, with the sophomore release, "The Bends," Radiohead has proven the success of "Creep" was no fluke. This band is in it for the long haul.

Radiohead writes good, solid songs, and with proper shaping there is no telling where this band is headed.

See **RADIOHEAD** *on page 24*

Radiohead

Continued from page 10—

Alternating between mellow, lyrically heavy tunes and guitar-driven rockers, the modern rockers' performance was convincing. Focusing on material selected from its two releases, Radiohead's set flowed effortlessly.

While set lulls were certain, the band rebounded with sonic assaults like "Fake Plastic Trees" and "My Iron Lung." Combining crunchy guitar and melancholy lyrical despair, Radiohead's music is custom-made for the angst-ridden young population.

Radiohead — Thom Yorke, Phil Selway, Ed O'Brien, Colin Greenwood and Johnny Greenwood — seems destined to at least rack up sales equivalent to those registered by "Pablo Honey."

With the multiple-single strength of "The Bends" and Radiohead's above-average live show, it seems likely the band will leap to much larger status. □

DAILY VARIETY

MONDAY, JUNE 19, 1995

Radiohead

(Palace, 1,250 capacity, $12.50 top)

Promoted by Goldenvoice/Avalon KROQ. Band: Thom E. York, Jonny Greenwood, Ed O'Brien, Colin Greenwood, Phil Selway. Reviewed June 15, 1995.

Of all the hyped English bands to arrive Stateside since the current British pop invasion began (with the so-called shoegazer movement of the late 1980s), only Radiohead has combined an ability to overcome the dreaded sophomore slump — as its fine new album, "The Bends" (Capitol), deftly demonstrates — *and* put on a thoroughly entertaining concert.

Fronted by kinetic singer/guitarist/lyricist Thom York, Radiohead Thursday night used tempo and dynamic shifts, musical and lyrical nuance and a refreshing stage presence that comfortably communicated songs of yearning, heartache and, yes, youthful angst.

York's twists and grimaces along with his songs endeared him to the nearly full house; guitarist Jonny Greenwood mixed delicate acoustic strumming and broad power chords throughout the 100 minute show with exemplary results.

"The Bends" is off to a slow start commercially, but it's only a matter of time before the album and Radiohead, are both rewarded with the notice that they deserve.

Songs such as the plaintive "High and Dry," the hefty psychedelic "Planet Telex" and recent single and MTV hit video "Fake Plastic Trees" were engaging compositions, full of drama and imagination that offered, on an affecting level, much more substance than the usual pre-packaged band.

The show ended with York and guitarist Greenwood dueting on a wistful new acoustic number, a pleasant reminder of the duo's short acoustic tour last year that helped boost anticipation for the new album. **—Troy J. Augusto**

Mademoiselle

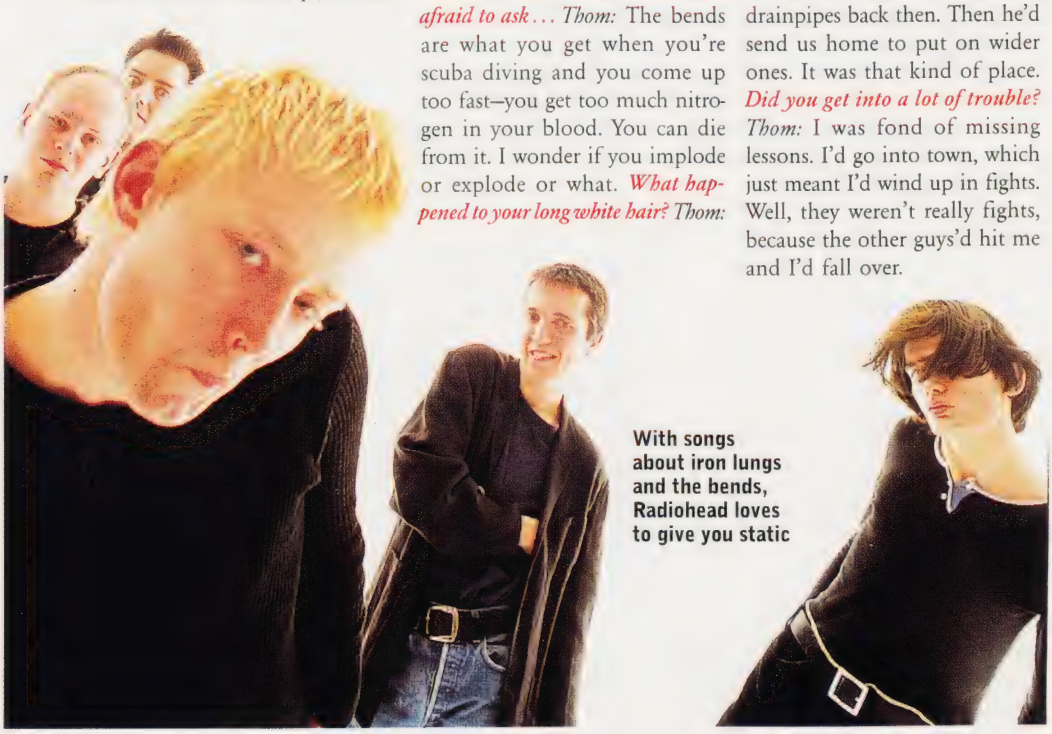
March 1995

creep show

For five guys named Radiohead, **playing the weirdo** has a way of paying off

BY CAREN MYERS

BACK IN 1993, THOM YORKE, Radiohead's 25-year-old lead singer, proved you don't need a positive attitude to get a hit: "Creep" ("I'm a creep/I'm a weirdo") launched the English band's career. We joined Thom and 22-year-old guitarist Jonny Greenwood over lunch and talked about Thom's platinum hair and "My Iron Lung," their new single: *So, what is an iron lung? Thom:* It's an artificial respirator. They were used on polio patients in the '50s. You'd be stuck in this huge steel box, and your head was the only thing that could move. You'd just live like that for the rest of your life. *Your new album is called* The Bends. *I'm afraid to ask . . . Thom:* The bends are what you get when you're scuba diving and you come up too fast—you get too much nitrogen in your blood. You can die from it. I wonder if you implode or explode or what. *What happened to your long white hair? Thom:* It broke off. Honestly. I went to the hairdresser's to get it dyed, and when they toweled it, my hair just fell out. *You met at an all-boys school near Oxford. What was that like? Jonny:* It was a bit like Alcatraz. My housemaster would measure the bottom width of our trousers—we wore [a skinny pants style called] drainpipes back then. Then he'd send us home to put on wider ones. It was that kind of place. *Did you get into a lot of trouble? Thom:* I was fond of missing lessons. I'd go into town, which just meant I'd wind up in fights. Well, they weren't really fights, because the other guys'd hit me and I'd fall over.



With songs about iron lungs and the bends, Radiohead loves to give you static

NEW MUSIC NOW

AP

ALTERNATIVE PRESS

In Search Of My Bloody Valentine

By Simon Reynolds

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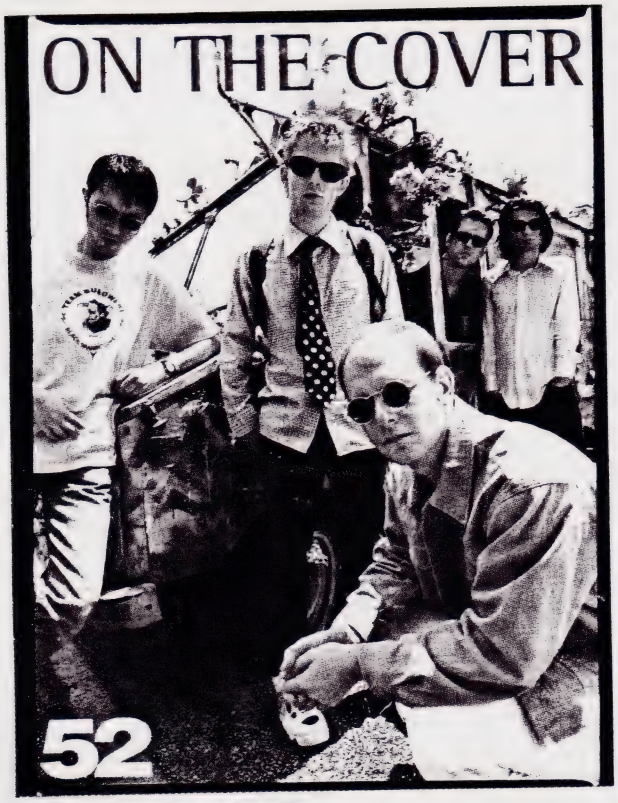
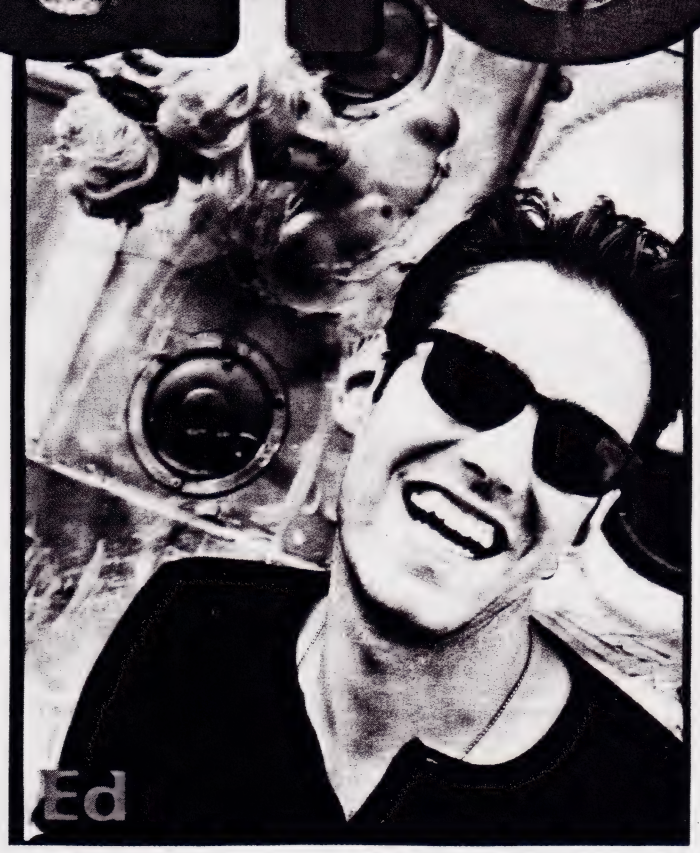


52 Radiohead
Randee Dawn hits the road with rock-stars-in-training Radiohead as they attune to doctors, Dambuilders, drivers, and a desperate moment alone.

Radio



ALTERNATIVE PRESS
October 1995
page 4

Modulation Across The Nation

Once considered merely one-hit wonders, Radiohead have confounded skeptics with 'The Bends,' an album destined to dominate the airwaves. Will America tune in to their frequency? Randee Dawn follows their signal on tour, and witnesses a golden age of wireless. Image transmission by Brian Garrity.

head

"You can force it, but it will not come" —"Planet Telex"

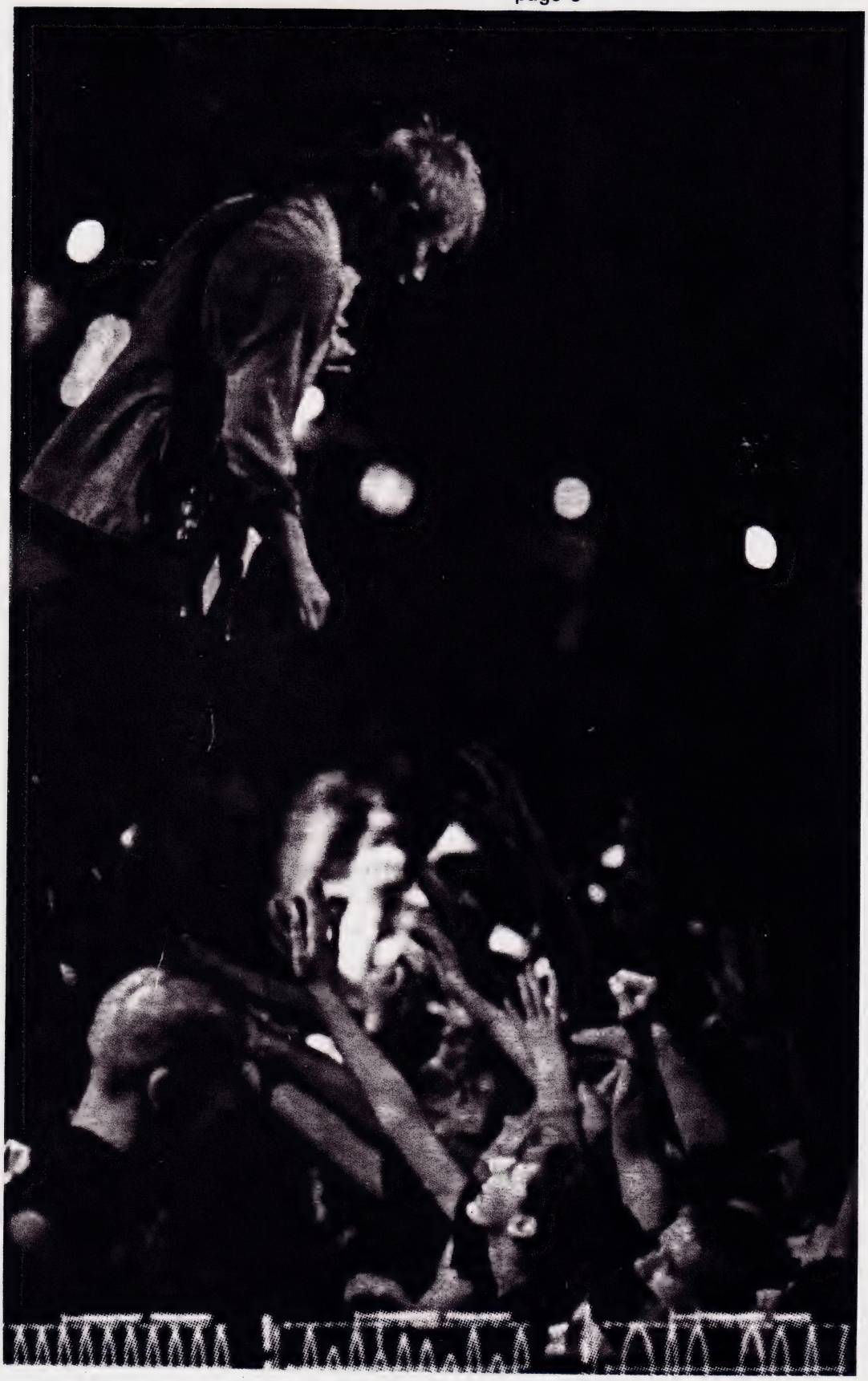
They pass, silent and unnoticed, through the vast, echoing train station, gliding to the exit as a unit, carrying with them a sleepy haze to match the humid grayness of the afternoon. Slouching in queue for the taxis, Radiohead wait with the patience of those who are accustomed to the task.

Jonny Greenwood pulls out a thick book and tries to steal a few words. Thom Yorke lags behind everyone else but his choppy, flaring red hair acts like a signal light. Colin Greenwood, dressed nattily in a dark, double-breasted jacket and small, rounded sunglasses, smokes a cigarette between two fingers in the delicate way of Englishmen, and they wait. Finally, someone comments, "You do *not* look like tourists."

Colin starts a bit and grows defensive. "Well, what do we look like?"

"Well, you look like rock stars."

Colin sighs melodramatically. "Finally. After all these years."



BOSTON

"If I could be who you wanted all the time..." —"Fake Plastic Trees"

Thom Yorke has always wanted to be a pop star. Back when some of his friends were deciding which office cubicle they would disappear behind after college graduation, back before the rest of his friends envisioned becoming traveling artisan hippies, Thom told everyone he was going to be a pop star. "And that," he says, "is what my father told everyone I wanted to do with myself. Only now that it's come true, he doesn't know what to say."

It's not such a bad thing, being a pop star. You're provided a jumbo-sized tour bus, girls (and boys) eagerly await your emergence from backstage, and hell, look what you're being *paid* to do. No sir, being a pop star these days could be considered the easy life. And hopefully, someday someone will inform Radiohead of that fact.

Because right now, in the cave-like cool of the Paradise rock club in Boston, being a pop star sucks. It is the first night of Radiohead's tour in America, and everyone is still reeling in a foggy haze of jet lag. There is the low-lying dread of having a perfect stranger on the tour for several days—a *music journalist* no less—but high above that creeping inevitability is the fact that Thom can't hear.

Striding into the cave out of the glaring afternoon sun, Thom clutches the sides of his head as if the artillery fire of Phil Selway's drumcheck is too much for him, which it is. "I've got fluid in my ears," he explains, resting his book on a cocktail table, "and it makes me hypersensitive. I'm going to have to wear earplugs, I think, for soundcheck and the show."

Rock Star 101 Lecture number one: Why Pop Stars Don't Fly to Every Gig. While there may be other reasons (namely, money), driving from point A to point B is a fact of life for bands, no matter how much cash they can get a record company to front them. Traveling is dehydrating, and the changes in pressure, Tom explains, wreak havoc on your system. Sure, nobody notices if they fly once a month or less. But prior to the tour beginning tonight in Boston, Radiohead jetted across the U.S., showing off their latest album, *The Bends*, with special promotional gigs, including several acoustic dates. Despite glowing British press reviews, at first the reception abroad was skeptical at best. To many Americans, this was the "Creep" band, the one-hit wonder whose first

new single, "Fake Plastic Trees," a meandering, slow tune, wasn't exactly burning up the charts. In the face of this, Radiohead flew from place to place, day after day, gig after gig, until Thom's ears filled with water, as if he'd been swimming in the deep end of the pool.

He has another reason to be concerned: backstage, pacing up and down, insisting on seeing "one doctor in each city, if necessary," Thom mutters that deafness runs in his family, and that this drowning of his hearing could be a first sign of trouble. And to look at him, in his much-pondered-upon pale, childlike frame, it does not seem impossible that one day, Thom Yorke could just wake up one morning, deaf as Beethoven.

Siam Cuisine, Boston

Joan Wasser, the Dambuilders member with the long streak of blonde in her ebony hair, is enjoying her Thai dinner not more than five feet from Radiohead's restaurant table, and Colin Greenwood is beside himself. Mustering his courage, he walks over to her table, has a moment or two of conversation, and comes back to his own food. "I love the Dambuilders," he says. "Do you own anything of theirs?"

Enter Colin, the lone bassist in a band of guitarists, fervent fan of the Dambuilders and Tricky, avid bookworm. In fact, while nearly every Radiohead is a bookworm, Colin, who graduated Cambridge University with an English Literature degree, is the keenest reader. Were he not eating, Colin would probably be found curled up with his history of Greek occupation during WWII. "When the Italian general surrendered to the Allied Forces in '43, the Germans were still occupying Greece," explains Colin, "and a lot of Italian soldiers were killed on the island waiting for the Allied Forces to come and save them. It turns out Churchill had plans to invade Greece and liberate it but had been advised not to."

Life with Colin is not always this dry, but thus far there is precious little tour to speak of. Thanks to Thom's health problems, a long flight over, and general first-night jitters, *The Bends* tour (which won't officially begin for another two hours) is not starting very auspiciously. Under the surface, something is brewing within the band, an almost intangible need that no one vocalizes just yet.

On the surface, Colin is not fazed by the tour. It is something he will read, soundcheck, and bass his way through, almost a holiday but not quite. It may be only the first night, but for Colin, everything is already old hat. "I remember meeting Gene in New York a while ago," he says, "and they were really excited about coming to America, and it was weird because I felt like the tired old musician, and we've only done three tours here. Elvis Costello did *seventeen* tours.

"And you see reflected in their faces something that you had when you turned up the first time. Not the 'We're going to show America where the true rock lies,' just... something more eager. And what's weird about that is that everything you do as a band, whatever band you're in, is basically the same. There's not much diversity between what PJ Harvey does or Radiohead does or Gene does, in terms of promotion, bus, soundcheck, bus, Denny's, soundcheck, laundry, bus, gig. But it does beat working."

"You've seen what we're like, but you might want to put in brackets, 'I was told that I'd never find out what they're really like.'"
—guitarist Ed O'Brien

Between gigs, it might be said, there is no Radiohead, just five guys from the same hometown of Oxford, England, who went to the same school but never really associated until they

started a band called On A Friday in the late '80s. No one's individual identity hinges on being part of a group 24 hours a day; like five straight, infinite lines they are on their own course, and scatter in multiple directions when there is no reason to be a band. But where all the lines intersect, where all five guys, five personalities—five *wires* cross—that juncture is Radiohead.

Boston's show will not be considered a highlight of the tour. Technically, Radiohead's wires cross as they churn out nearly all of *The Bends* much louder and harder than the John Leckie-produced album would lead anyone to think Radiohead could play. Nearly in a froth, the crowd responds by stage-diving, nearly taking over the performance. Thom, tense and agitated over the earplugs (during soundcheck he cried, "Am I in key?") knocks a mosher off the stage with his guitar, yelling, "Stop all this fucking moshing!" At one point Ed takes charge, removing his guitar to toss a stage diver into the hands of security, drawing his own line in the sand.

"It seems the people who are into moshing are those people from college who you detested, the sports jocks," says Ed later on. "The ones who normally stayed away from so-called alternative shows, and who were seen at a Van Halen or Bon Jovi show, and now think alternative music is their thing. And that's fine, I'm very much for winning those people over, but don't bring your fucking bullying instincts to one of our gigs where there are young girls and blokes out there. It's become an ego thing, so they get to be a hero with their friends. Maybe we should have a cage at stage right, like Metallica. We could throw them meat during the show."

Fortunately, the next night in Providence, Rhode Island, goes much better. While the moshers yell right back at the band, Radiohead are warming up to the challenge of touring, and as if to prove composure does not equal confidence, Colin drinks himself stupid, running around after the show, "telling everybody I wanted to have their children, or something like that. There was this sense of relief, that it could be really, really good over here. We weren't sure it could be again."

Three days later, the whole tour nearly implodes.

NEW YORKE CITY

"Radiohead singer is Martin Short!" —message posted on the Internet

Life on the road, even when you've only been officially on the road a week, can get weird. "I don't think we really knew what we were letting ourselves in for," says Thom about his horrendous experiences touring acoustically. "By the end of that three-month period I felt like a politician more than a musician. And then we went on to do this tour... to go on and be a publicity machine again, it was just more than I could stomach. I was telling Tim [Radiohead's tour manager] to book me a flight home the day we arrived in New York. I had a complete breakdown that night."

The strain is well disguised at Tramps, where Radiohead blast their way back into New York like they own the place. Thom, with his Woody Woodpecker hair and skinny tie, rants and stomps about like Johnny Rotten's second cousin twice removed forcibly, and the songs sound tighter and more focused. The music thing they've got sewn up. It's with everything else they're having difficulties.

Meanwhile, it's time to play The Hit again, and despite the obviousness of playing it, "Creep" is one hell of a song to hear live. That furniture-moving riff that Jonny breaks in twain just before the chorus is death-defying to hear live, to watch his braced arm (a result of

Washington D.C.
Bends
Just
Anyone
Bones
High + Dry
Black star
Prove yourself
Vegetable
Fake plastic trees
Planet telex
creep
My iron lung
Bullet. S.S. B.O.

repetitive stroke syndrome) slice up and down and hear that *noise* come out makes him the most powerful man in the room. Even after thousands of playings, The Hit still devastates.

After the show, Phil hangs around with his family-in-law, and soon departs for a night of calm drinking. Colin never even showed his face downstairs, dashing off to see Tricky play. Ed—well, Ed is around, but he is about to put a lot of hard work in developing a hangover for the next day. Jonny, formerly the most powerful man in the room, is reduced back to himself, tall and gangly with impossible cheekbones, and is chatting with a young woman named Valerie, who has told him he resembles a friend of hers in England. "You look like my friend Gina," she says. "You could be a member of her family."

"Well," smiles Jonny, "we're all a bit inbred in England. Have you seen the royal family?"

Thom is hiding. The best evidence of his still-cranky mood comes when a writer for *People* magazine sashays out of the dressing room, peeved. "All I said was what a great concert it was," he sniffs. "Some people can't take a compliment."

But in the end, crisis or no, the tour goes on. "What brought me back," Thom says, "was just talking to the others, 'cause they're my best friends and if there's something wrong they need to know about it." And there came the breakthrough—what had been niggling under the surface since Boston was a need for some free-form creative time. "We just sat around and tried to work it out with [our manager] Tim so we can get time to play. It's such a simple thing. It's the only thing that keeps us going. I can't write at home because home is home, and when I try to pick up a guitar it's like, 'Oh, he wants to write something,' and suddenly all these ghouls come up and start looking at you saying, 'Oi, go ahead, write something good.' On tour, your whole existence is music anyway...

"I exist," says Thom, "mostly in this. My life outside the band is this big," he pinches a hair's breadth of air, "and the band is my life, like 99.9 percent. That sounds horrible, it sounds really crap, but it is true. What a sad twat I am. I obviously need help."

WASHINGTON D.C.

"Where do we go from here?" —"The Bends"

It is hot in Washington, so hot that it will rain before the night is out, but not before the sky seems to settle on the sidewalks, the air soupy and thick. After a morning ride down the East Coast in a quiet Amtrak car, and an afternoon of further dozing, reading, and phone interviews in their day room at the Savoy, Radiohead are ensconced at the Black Cat, a nightclub in the heart of what is arguably the worst part of town in the murder capital of the world.

Parked outside the club, Radiohead have a bus—a great white behemoth of a bus, splashed with cheesy airbrushed Western scenes, a churning air conditioner on wheels. It sleeps twelve, which, since Radiohead tour in the same vehicles as their roadies, will fit just fine. Radiohead are very proud of their vehicle, and greet with tight lips jokes about the possibility of it being sold for its parts before the night is over.

"Imagine us," says Ed, delicately playing pool with Jonny and still emerging from the cloud of his hangover. "I'm 27 years old, I'm on a bus with eleven other men, plus a driver, we're living in 45 feet of space. That's fairly strange. When my dad was 27, I was two years old, he'd bought a house and was raising a family. And the stranger thing is, it feels very natural, as well."

In fact, however, Radiohead do not really have a bus. They have an air-conditioned clubhouse on wheels. It is a place where foot odor is not questioned, nor is the daily memo, tacked to a corkboard at the front of the vehicle, drawn to resemble a set of breasts. It sports blinds covering opaque windows, a microwave, two televisions with VCRs, sofas, and beds resembling coffins cut out of the side of the walls. It is a sacred place, and visitors are not looked on kindly.

"Your bus is like your inner sanctum," says Ed, "and people get very nervous with strangers on the bus. It's like the nerve center, like going into someone's bedroom. It's a place where you can just chill out. There are these unseen rules, or etiquette about the bus. We've had good friends before on the bus and it just is not a good idea."

End of Rock Lecture Two: It's time for Radiohead to soundcheck; highly personal, yet sloppy and casual, it's a lot like the bus, a sanctuary where the band can retreat, and be themselves. Hearing a soundcheck is like watching the outtakes of a film, and as Andy Warhol said, the outtakes are the most interesting part. After that, the performance is just gravy.

And then, during one song, Thom leaps from the stage, still playing his unplugged banana-yellow electric guitar. Chasing the soundman across the expanse of tiles, pointing the neck of the guitar like a gun, Thom runs full out, intent and grinning. It is the most spontaneous gesture he has made on the tour, and in that one brief moment of leaping and chasing with his guitar he is free, unthinking, beautiful. Backing up to the stage he scrambles back to his place without ever losing grip on his guitar, and the moment passes.

Soundcheck over, the band retreat to the boiler-room atmosphere of downstairs at the Black Cat. Ed and Phil are chatting with a local woman named Lynda, who has told them that the first

Tune In, Read On

Meet up with someone who has toured with Radiohead and what tales can be told? Sex? Drugs? Violence? "Well," recalls Tanya Donelly, singer with Belly, who toured with Radiohead when "Creep" was riding high on the charts, "after the tour was over we had a book party, and everyone in our band bought books for everyone in their band, and they all bought books for us. Someone gave me Geek Love, which is a great book. Tom [Gorman, Belly's guitarist] and Ed [O'Brien] still mail books to each other." With that in mind, here's some suggested Radiohead reading:

Vurt by Jeff Noon: Science fiction à la *Johnny Mnemonic*, spotted with Thom in Boston.

Distant Voices by John Pilcher: Recommends Jonny, "He's this famous Australian journalist who did documentaries about Vietnam, explaining how these invasions were being funded or carried out by America and Britain. Alarming, but a wonderful book."

White Album by Joan Didion: A book of observations about America's West Coast, with subjects ranging from the rise of shopping malls to the Black Panther movement. Recommended by Ed.

Historical nonfiction: Particularly books about Greek occupation, discussed in depth by Colin, who also tries to read the English newspaper *The Guardian* on a daily basis on tour. "I read the news today, oh boy," quips Colin.

Situationist/ Postmodernist nonfiction: Says Thom, "It's interesting how shopping has been turned into the ultimate creative urge. People walking up and down South Street, shopping. I went out and bought some ridiculous trainers that look like moon boots, that's what I did this week. This is all stuff I've read in these Situationist books."

time she heard "Creep" on the radio she had to pull over to the side of the road and have a good cry. Phil apologizes.

Somehow, it makes sense that Phil does this sort of thing. While it may be a cliché to call the drummer the anchor of the band, Phil, the eldest of the group, the only married member, slips with a practiced ease into the role. An enigma to some (the band's newsletter *W.A.S.T.E.* routinely has a segment called "Who is Phil?"), Selway is the only member to have his own personal fan club.

"It's in Osaka," he says, smiling. "It was strange playing gigs over there last time, going to play a show and then spot someone wearing a 'Phil Is Great!' t-shirt. Only in Japan, I suppose."

Jonny, who will be the most powerful man in the Black Cat in a few hours, is resting on a couch in the homey-yet-windowless dressing room, cornered for a chat. Quiet and almost anonymous, Jonny keeps to himself better than the rest of the band, who merely act as if they are carefully restraining their personalities in front of the journalist constantly in their presence. When Jonny speaks, closed-mouthed, his slight lisp turns his words into a near whisper, and his darkly pooled brown eyes give nothing away. A future student of musical theory, this Jonny loves jazz.

"Jazz is one of the few areas of music where the musicians really lived what they were doing, really purely," he says. "Occasionally that happens with rock and roll bands but it's so wrapped up in image and sensationalism that it's hard to get to. I'm sick of the whole disingenuous 'I only know two chords, but hey man I'm writing beautiful songs,' the whole noble savage cliché. You have to strike a balance between being that noble savage and being Steely Dan and being washed-out and emotionless."

Thom dips his head into the dressing room, gripping his guitar in one hand, and seeing the room full, he darts back out again.

"I approach playing with Radiohead as being the most immediate and physical reaction to what I'm hearing, whatever Thom is singing or playing," Jonny continues. "I don't think about it, or plan it, I'll be looking for new chords in my head while he's singing and just instinctively plug them in there."

In England, a black cat brings good luck. In America, though, the myths reverse themselves.

The problem started small, something to do with Radiohead's onstage monitors conflicting with the external monitors. Then it ballooned—Radiohead couldn't hear themselves right, and the whole mess was wrecking Thom's ear so they had to downshift into slower songs. Though outwardly the show sounds smooth, and if not flawless at least *good enough*, Radiohead feel crushed.

"We got used to playing theaters," says Ed. "We got used to playing with better sound quality and equipment, and when we couldn't hear ourselves onstage, it ruined it for us." As soon as the show ends, they slink down to the boiler room for a meeting, as grim as businessmen hashing out a failed strategy.

Upstairs, fans await the end of the meeting. Though few people waited in Boston, and not many in Providence or New York, by Washington D.C. the fans have gotten into gear and stand politely poised, pens and posters at the ready. Two of the fans are prepubescent girls, so small and young they literally giggle behind their hands as Jonny returns from below, presenting two guitar picks, one for each. "Oh, thank you, Jonny*yyyyy*," they cry, hugging the plastic triangles. Jonny waves at them as he heads out to the bus and they speak in exclamation marks again: "Have a nice trip, Jonny*yyyyy*!" When Thom emerges, they surround him, and thrust their pens into his hands. He smiles in a pale, tight way and looks pleased.

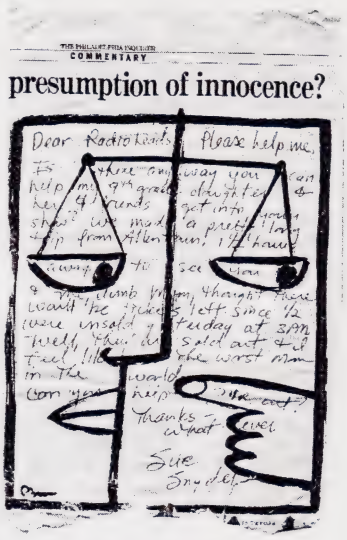
As the girls leave ("Goodbye, Thom*yyyyy*!!!") manager Tim acts bemused. He recognizes them from the last tour, and marvels that their parents allow them to come to a nightclub at their age. "By the time they're 15," says Tim, "they'll either be sick of the whole thing or will have become horrendous tarts."

Says Thom, "We're their second favorite band. Their first favorite band is Nirvana. We don't mind any of that, we don't mind doing things for *Smash Hits*, which is this teeny magazine in Britain. I don't have a problem with that at all. There's a totally inverted snobbery which I don't agree with—as much as I don't agree with being only that. After all, the cool, hip kids shit on you just as fast as everybody else. In fact, faster."

PHILADELPHIA, PA

"I wish I could be happy I wish I wish I wish that something would happen"
—"The Bends"

It didn't seem like a long cab ride when they left the Embassy Suites about fifteen minutes ago, but somehow, the cabbie propelling three-fifths of Radiohead to the Theater of the Living Arts has decided to take the scenic route. The cab races down blocked-off side streets, past dilapidated, vacant brick buildings, some with people lounging outside drinking from paper bags. Late already, Ed, Thom, and Phil say no more than two words to each other during the harrowing ride, and when the driver finally pulls in sight of the humanity-jammed, tree-lined South Street, they hop out like the car is about to catch on fire. "I really think we should get a discount for that ride," demands Ed, who when not debilitated by a hangover all day goes jogging with Phil, organizes car rides, and takes care of general business.



"This is our job," says Ed, "but it is frustrating at times."

Maneuvering their way past fans who have waited just inside the Theatre of the Living Arts, they head through gray and pink doors, greeted by a welcome blast of air conditioning, and scatter to battle stations. The Theatre, as it turns out, is one of Radiohead's favorite places to play, and why becomes clear early on. Aside from excellent acoustics, the place is laid out for the audience, sloping upwards in the back so no matter how far back you stand, you get a clear shot of the stage, which is enormous, lined by a gold ring around the entrance, as if the band inside are bathed in some heavenly aura. Almost immediately, they crank into soundcheck, and the workday begins.

Afterwards, the rest of the band leave to find some dinner, but Colin, hungry only for a cigarette, is lounging in the pastel-colored dressing room. "The American press," Colin says, "has a problem with being timely. By the time something comes out—like that Kurt Cobain issue of *Rolling Stone*—it's what, six months after it's happened!" He seems about to say more when a security guard comes in bearing a scrap of newspaper.

"This woman gave it to me downstairs," says the security guard, "so I thought I ought to show it to you." According to the note, a mother has driven an hour-and-a-half from Allentown, bringing her daughter and friends to see the band, but the show is sold out. "I feel like the worst mother in the world," the note finishes.

"Yeah, let them in," says Colin.

There just is no getting around it. Radiohead are such *nice* boys.

With such good karma in place, when Radiohead blow the lid off the Theatre that evening, it comes as no surprise. As if all roads have led into Philadelphia, the show is the best they have had all tour, no technical difficulties, no ear ailments, nearly no moshing. During "Bones," Thom dances like a wild man, with a Joe Cocker twitch that makes him flinch hard when Jonny whacks the big chords, as if the music is assaulting or charging him. During a second encore, they debut a rough, acoustic version of a new song called "Subterranean Homesick Alien."

"Like the Dylan song, but not," says Thom later, grinning like a Cheshire cat.

Final Rock Star Lecture: How to Leave the Building. Should you insist on leaving your own gig through the front door and before a reasonable period of time (two days is a good estimate), you should expect to find some fans still out there, waiting for you. A lot of waiting occurs on tour, and not all of it is done by the band.

Thom leaves by the front door approximately fifteen minutes after his show is over, slinging his omnipresent navy blue rucksack over his shoulder. Someone cries, "Oh my god!" and in a great flash of camera light the assembled crowd surges toward him. He soars out into them, smiling for photos and bending over for autographs on t-shirts, CDs, human flesh. Overcome, the girl standing closest to him leans over and kisses him on the top of his head. "He smells nice," she tells her boyfriend, who also leans over and kisses Thom on the head.

Out rushes the Capitol Records representative to save Thom from the horde but he shrugs her off and, after some time, begins to make his way down South Street, in search of a bar. Turning to one glowing fan, wearing a Radiohead rugby shirt, he asks, "Know any good bars around here?" She points toward the Copacabana, a garishly painted place on a nearby corner. Thom gets carded. Thom has no ID. Thom sputters, "For fuck's sake," and gets in when the journalist who's been following them all this time makes a stink. Thom orders a margarita and a Rolling Rock. He is stoked—from the show, yes, but certainly the fan reception plays a large part.

"Sometimes," he says about the fans outside, "I'm in a real state after a show, and I can't talk to them, and I always feel bad afterwards. I remember when I was in that position, getting

drunk, talking to Everything But The Girl, and we had a really nice chat when I was 15. And then I've met some other guys who are total assholes. But now I realize that sometimes you're just too tired to deal with it. But when you walk out of a venue like that and say 'No autographs' then it's like 'Fuck you!'"

But the idea of having your body scent critiqued right on the spot, total strangers kissing your *head*....

"It's nice," he says, surprised anyone would think otherwise. "It's the only fucking kiss I get. It's the only time I get any physical contact with *anybody*."

No matter how many fans kiss his head, though, what is really getting Thom worked up now is that at the end of that night's drive to Montreal, they will have one whole day to themselves, one whole day to play *for* themselves in a rented venue, to make up more songs and test them out in front of more total strangers the following night. Says Thom, "Me here, on the road, that's where I am. Going back on tour... it's like being back to normal. I think that's mostly me, actually. I feel that most acutely. Off tour, Colin goes to London and hangs out with his friends there, Phil has his wife, Ed has his girlfriend, Jonny has his girlfriend... but that all feels like limbo while I'm on tour. And I think that whole New York thing was me trying to make a desperate break for normal existence. Get on a plane, I know! I'm gonna find *me*, I'm gonna be normal! But here I am."

On the cab ride back to the hotel (a straight shot this time), the car stops at a traffic light and a college-aged boy recognizes Thom and peers in the window, staring goggle-eyed. As the car rolls away, Thom says, "That just reminds me of when I was younger and had to serve drinks at my parents' one-and-only dinner party, just standing back behind the bar and needing to use the toilet all the time. Everyone stared then, too, pinched my cheeks, all that."

The cab pulls up at the hotel and deposits Thom on the quiet, late-night streets of Philadelphia. He scurries into the big white air-conditioned clubhouse, safe and secure with twelve other men in 45 feet of space. And north they drive, to Canada, where lying in wait in the miles ahead are infinitely more fans, autographs, cigarettes, and maybe, some more music. AP

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STATIC ELECTRICITY

ROCK&ROLL

AT A TRENDY EAST VILlage restaurant that bears a resemblance to a mausoleum, three members of the British group Radiohead and a pair of American journalists are sipping wine and chatting about their favorite new bands. As names like Mercury Rev, Supergrass and the Geraldine Fibbers are tossed out like popcorn to pigeons, vocalist Thom Yorke frowns with annoyance, slaps his hands over his ears and hums to shut out the discourse. Finally he slams his fists on his

RADIOHEAD

TRANSFORM EMOTIONAL TURMOIL INTO KINETIC POP

BY JON WIEDERHORN

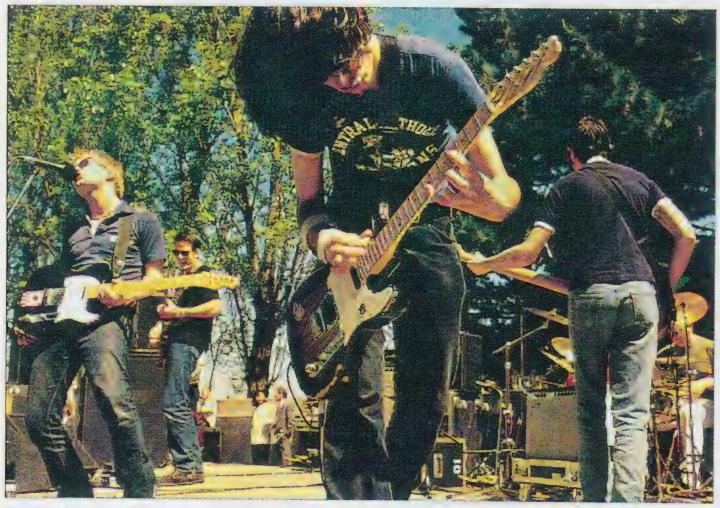
COLIN GREENWOOD, ED O'BRIEN, THOM YORKE, JONNY GREENWOOD AND PHIL SELWAY (FROM LEFT)

ROLLING STONE
September 7, 1995

"I FEEL GUILT FOR ANY SEXUAL FEELINGS I HAVE," YORKE SAYS.

lap and shouts, "You're not talking about music, you're talking about opinions. Can't we talk about something else?" The conversation switches to movies, and Yorke rolls his eyes and resumes sulking.

Meet Thom Yorke, the man behind the deliciously disturbing pop of Radiohead. Emotional outbursts are common for the singer, whose inner turmoil has driven the band to notoriety since its stormy single "Creep" helped make 1993's *Pablo Honey* a gold record. But Yorke's disposition contrasts sharply with the passive countenance of his band mates. A few hours ago, while Yorke was passed out under a table, guitarists Jonny Greenwood and Ed O'Brien, bassist Colin Greenwood and drummer Phil Selway were munching sandwiches and playing an exciting game of . . . not poker, not gin rummy but *bridge* at the other side of the room.

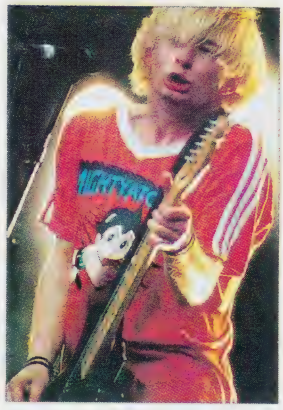


Radiohead at this year's Live 105 festival, in San Francisco

And even though Yorke says he has "always been melodramatic about everything," even *he* tends to avoid public hissy fits. Radiohead have never thrown a television out a window, and a few weeks ago, when their opening act, David Gray, trashed the band's dressing room, the group tidied up the place after Gray's entourage had left. When Radiohead hit the road with R.E.M. and Soul Asylum this fall, they probably won't even touch the deli trays without first asking the headliners. "We were all brought up in middle-class Oxford [England], and there's an air of politeness there that's hard to escape," says the soft-spoken O'Brien, shrugging.

This politeness makes Radiohead's turbulent melodies all the more compelling. Alternately quivering with heart-rending insecurity and self-deprecating anguish, the band's new album, *The Bends,* is an emotional seesaw that never remains balanced. In contrast to groups like Green Day and Red Hot Chili Peppers, whose songs reflect their personalities, Radiohead's warped pop expresses such sentiments as sexual inadequacy, existential dread and red-faced rage – feelings most of the band members have trouble communicating without the aid of amps and guitars. "The only time I feel comfortable is when I'm in front of a mike," says Yorke, who looks like a cross between John Lydon and Martin Short. "I'm obsessed with the idea that I'm completely losing touch with who I am, and I've come to the conclusion that there isn't anything to Thom Yorke other than the guy that makes those painful songs."

"PEOPLE SOMETIMES ask me if I'm happy, and I tell them to fuck off," Yorke says later in the bar of his hotel. "If I was happy, I'd be in a fucking car advert. A lot of people think they're happy, and they live these boring lives and do the same things every day. But one day they wake up and realize that they haven't lived yet. I'd much rather celebrate the highs and lows of everyday life than try to deny them."



Yorke at Glastonbury, 1994

Yorke seems to thrive on tension and instability, cherishing the role of the suffering artist he has created for himself. "He doesn't like to feel satisfied," says Selway. "When things are going well, he will throw things off balance so that he'll be in a state of flux. That's the way he works best."

Such flux galvanizes songs like "My Iron Lung" and "Planet Telex," which feature sweeping sonic mood swings that arc from hushed despair to fiery frustration. But the overriding feelings are of longing and isolation. From the title track of *The Bends,* in which Yorke proclaims, "I need to wash myself again to hide all the dirt and pain/I'd be scared that there's nothing underneath/And who are my real friends?" back to the career-launching "Creep," in which Yorke asked, "What the hell am I doing here?" and exclaimed, "I wish I was special," Radiohead's songs are the narratives of a cynical misfit who longs to be loved. "There's a pervading sense of loneliness I've had since the day I was born," Yorke says. "Maybe a lot of other people feel the same way, but I'm not about to run up and down the street asking everybody if they're as lonely as I am. I'd probably get locked up."

Yorke was born in Wellingborough, England, in 1968 and grew up in Scotland near a beach covered with World War II bunkers and barbed wire. His father sold chemical-engineering equipment and was a champion university boxer. "One of the first things he ever bought me was a pair of boxing gloves," says Yorke. "He used to try to teach me to box, but whenever he hit me, I'd fall flat on my ass." When Yorke was 8, his family moved to Oxford. At 10 he formed his first band, and two years later he wound up at a boys boarding school near Abingdon, England, where he spent several of his most unhappy years. He had few friends, fought frequently and, despite his formative training, usually lost boxing matches. His social woes were amplified by an abnormality in his left eye for which he was teased mercilessly but has since learned to accept. "When I was 18, I worked in a bar, and this madwoman came in and said, 'You have beautiful eyes, but they're completely wrong.' Whenever I get paranoid, I just think about what she said."

After dropping out of a school punk band, Yorke decided to form his own outfit. He hooked up with classmates O'Brien (because he looked like Morrissey) and Colin Greenwood (because he dressed weird and went to lots of parties) and soon after completed the lineup with Selway and Greenwood's brother Jonny. They named themselves Radiohead after a song from Talking Heads' *True Stories* and finally landed a record deal in 1991.

While Yorke's hang-ups figure largely into Radiohead's sound, the group is more than the product of one distraught mind. If Yorke crafts Radiohead's emotional roller coaster, Colin Greenwood greases the rails. "Thom writes these songs that sound like a slightly more sinister Elvis Costello, then I come in and add extra structures and chords to make it more interesting," he says. "I have such a low boredom threshold that I need something more than good songs to keep my attention."

In concert, Greenwood refuses to play premeditated solos, viewing gigs as opportunities to experiment with parameters of sound. "I don't think I could play anything fresh if I've heard it 100 times before," he says. "It wouldn't be dangerous, and there'd be no chance of it going wrong."

When it comes to rocking, Radiohead deliver. During a recent show in Denver at a shoddy, sweltering venue that looked like a barn, the band displayed enough sexual charisma and high-wattage energy to keep the dehydrated crowd screaming. But when approached by attractive, lustful women after the show, the group wasn't quite so eager to please. "I've never taken advantage of the opportunity of one-night stands," says Greenwood. "It's like treating sex like sneezing. Sex is a fairly disgusting sort of tufted, smelly-area kind of activity, which is too intimate to engage in with strangers. I'm all for the erotic in terms of imagination, but the physical side is something different."

For Yorke, sexuality is an even more complex issue. "I feel tremendous guilt for any sexual feelings I have," he says, "so I end up spending my entire life feeling sorry for fancying somebody. Even in school I thought girls were so wonderful that I was scared to death of them. I masturbate a lot. That's how I deal with it."

In addition to attracting groupies, Radiohead's confessional music has entranced a number of eccentrics usually reserved for bands like Slayer and Pantera. A few weeks ago in Canada, a fan insisted that Greenwood autograph his arm, then returned the next day with a tattoo tracing the signature. And after *Pablo Honey* came out, a British murderer who identified with the character in "Creep" wrote Yorke a chilling letter from prison. "He said, 'I'm the creep in that song. I killed this bloke. They made me do it. It wasn't me, it was the words in my head,' " Yorke says. "I felt like someone had walked over my grave."

While *The Bends* is dynamic and passionate, it's not an immediately easy listen. Anyone expecting the fluid melodies of *Pablo Honey* may be thrown by the amalgam of experimental noise and meditative beauty. But it's that dichotomy that transforms the band's songs from pop ditties into seismic tugs of war. "It's all a reflection of us," says Yorke. "It's cynical and nervous, and it doesn't make sense. And you get the feeling at the end of it that something's wrong, but you can't quite work out what it is." ♫

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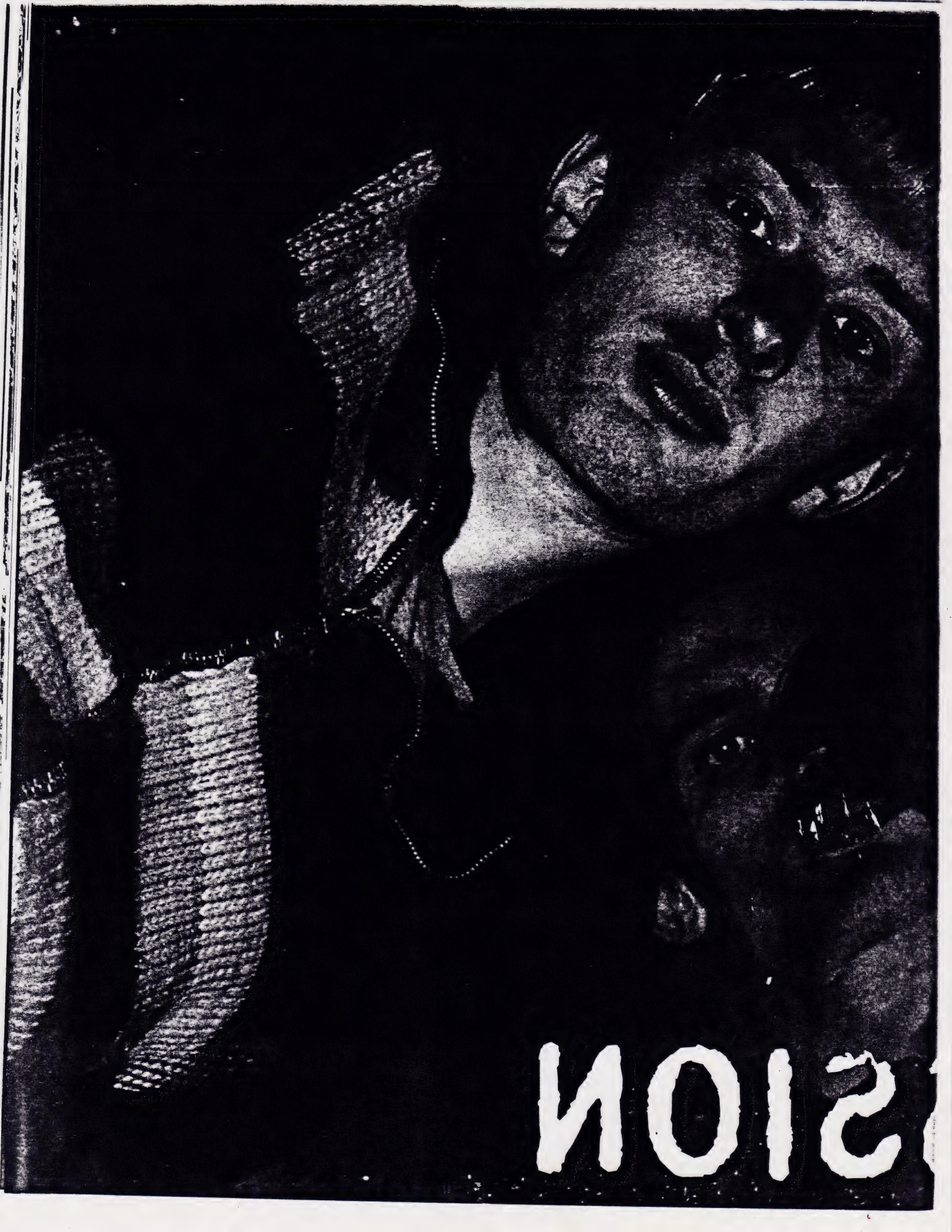
NOISS

Radiohead

PHOTO SANDRA C DAVIS
TEXT SANDRA A GARCIA

Rumors and gossip: everyone loves these tantalizing monsters. Only high-minded liars and clerics profess to be above them.

There's always cattiness whizzing around the decayed music biz. Writers wouldn't know how to exist without employing it. After Oxford's loudest sons smacked the world in the face with 'Creep,' their bitter ode to vulnerability, gossip central began to work overtime about Radiohead. They were splitting up, they had become drunkards, they hated everyone: the usual cliché material. The unkindest gossips reveled in Radiohead's one hit wonder status, gained thanks to the remix debacle of their second American single, 'Stop Whispering.' Ouch, whispered marketing managers. Ha ha, sneered less talented bands.

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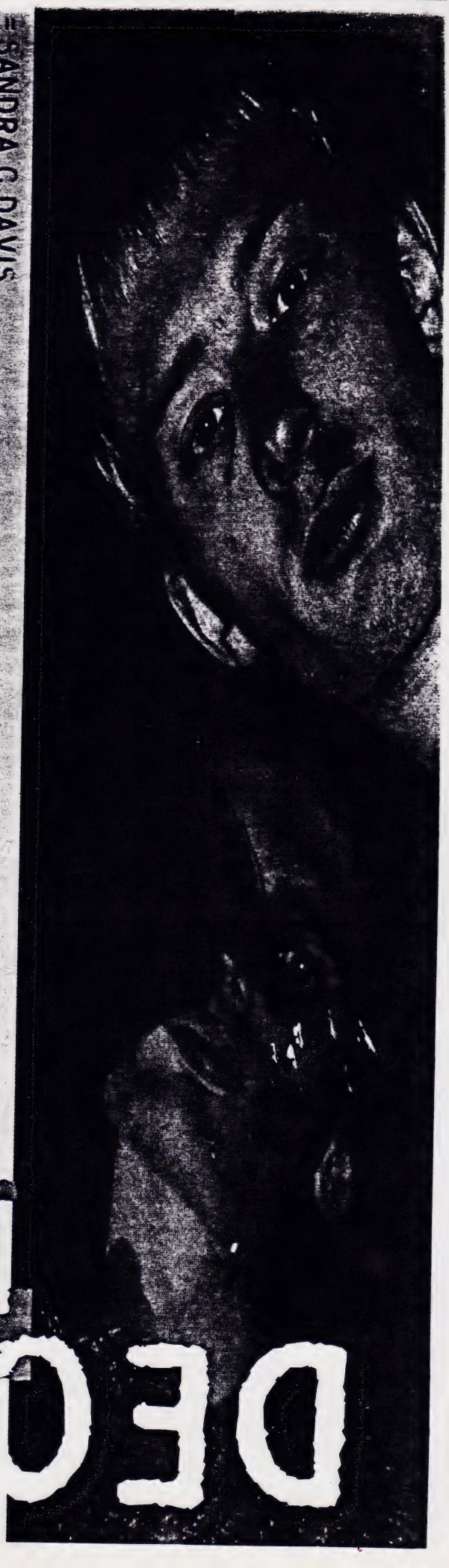

RADIOHEAD
(Continued from page 43)

Before we get too giddy about Radiohead's 1995 renewal, let's return to that ugly scenario: why did Radiohead ever allow the ill-mixed 'Stop Whispering' to live? One fatal error and their chance to mine a long life from a strong album did a flaming Hindenburg.

Our interview victims: Thom York, resident pugnacious blond vocalist and Jackie O. look-a-like /guitar genius Jonny Greenwood. Drummer Phil Selway is back in Britain while bassist Colin Greenwood and guitarist Ed O'Brien are doing the soundcheck for this duo's acoustic showcase: these two wish Ed and Colin would also perform.

The single's destruction caused Thom pain. "It hurt." There's a brief pause until he adds, "It hurt *me* anyway."

Jon quickly points out, "I was for releasing 'Blow Out.'"

Thom isn't sparing any venom. "It was bloody stupid."

In a charitable moment Jonny begins a solid explanation. "Capitol came in and said radio will play this..."

An appallingly arch American accent emerges from Thom's mouth to kill off Jonny's attempt. "'Radio will play *this*. It will be great.' It *wasn't*."

The duo freely admits this occurred since they hadn't learned the ability to scream NO. 'Creep's' rapid success thrust Radiohead into a brutal marketing nightmare with dizzying consequences to the band's confidence. Thom explains, "We hadn't realized that the only way to create music is for the five of us to be sitting in a room creating music, rather then going, 'what should we be doing now, sir? OK, suck Satan's cock.' We hadn't learned yet, and now we have," he declares. "So things have changed. We were just bloody *stupid*."

Jonny again takes the more restained tack. "I was upset, but they had been right about all those other things. You have to rely and trust them to an extent. So I think it's really foolish for bands to take the 'we hate our record company' line. It doesn't make much sense. You just have to be intelligent about it."

A epic sigh gusts from Thom's small frame, followed by a testy, "Yeah, but the problem was we didn't *have* the distance from it to work out what the hell was going on, to work out that the song didn't sound any good, that the mix was *shocking* and we spent too much money on the video. It's the usual follow-up syndrome. We just wanted to move on, really. It was just like 'oh *fuck*!' We had done so many versions of 'Stop Whispering' that you wouldn't *believe* it. Now Radiohead have this rule: you never *ever* record a song more than once. Never, unless it's live. One of the vital aspects of Radiohead is spontaneity, and that only happens once. And if we don't give it the opportunity to happen, then that's it. It's because we're been through it so extremely, with 'Stop Whispering' and the over-analysis of the first album, it's great, because we know there's certain perimeters you have to set to create. And we have set them, and it's brilliant."

Better that Radiohead learn that self-defense mechanism on their first album then on their fourth. Stupidity: get thee gone!

Ever hear their latest single 'Fake Plastic Trees' on the radio? When its fragile tones are displayed against the frightening din of Bush or White Zombie you remember it. It's the album version, too... no remixes allowed. Gossip, gossip: allegedly the war over releasing a remix held up *The Bend*'s release date...

No rumors on how long they'll stay out on tour this time around. They're scheduled for two weeks to start but that could turn into two months...but never two years.

"'IRON LUNG' was supposed COFFIN...the final nail in the the previously SONG that

It's a shame that interviewers haven't eradicated their own stupidity. Jon and Thom were relaxed for their photo session, ready to chat. Oh, someone who missed their allotted time showed up? In a rare moment of stupidity I allow the other scribbler to slide in.

But once back in Jon and Thom's presence I discovered these affable Brits had abruptly become the tension twins. Once prodded they apologized, confessing that their previous interviewer, working for a CD ROM zine, started off by asking how 'Creep' had affected their lives. "Worst interview I've ever done," mutters Thom. Jon is almost speechless at the sordid memory.

That's the last time I am gracious. Oh, now MTV wants the band a half hour earlier then planned? Lovely. Interview them in the limo going over then catch up with them later? I love this business.

There's soemthing bizarre happening in Radiohead's life... Jon describes there were legions of screaming teen-age girls at their recent Japanese shows.

"I would prefer that to some scary groupies," murmurs Thom. "There's always this feeling that you're somehow this extension of the Coca-Cola thing, like on MTV: you're always proceeded by Coca-Cola."

"Or sponsored by them," frets Jonny.

"Yeah, you turn up at some gigs, and what was that one that was sponsored by Pepsi... oh *fuck*," hisses Thom. "I don't even drink the stuff..."

Jonny mocks, "It's like we are the West and we have arrived..."

Thom sniffs, "Here's the cultural void: we're here." He's in a fine mood.

Screaming sweet young things never crossed Radiohead's wildest imagination. "It's a bit of a shock, really," agrees Thom.

"We couldn't even imagine being in a band that would be leaving England, really," adds Jonny.

"We couldn't imagine any of it, but then again, I am sure when we

signed our name on the dotted line we hadn't got a bloody clue of what we were doing," mutters Thom.

Oh stop it. That idea doesn't hold true. When I first interviewed Radiohead in the UK right before the shitstorm hit, they possessed confidence: yeah, we're good, we're better then the rest and we deserve something. No one knew yet if the rest of the world agreed with the five guys from Oxford's confidence, but their success couldn't have been a complete 'oh gosh guys, they really like us' shock.

Jon stresses, "We were good in each *others* eyes and ears."

Thom explains, "But the whole experience of other people partaking of the thing that we enjoy is still a novelty, really. It makes you nervous, because you make this album and you start thinking, 'ahh, people might hate this album completely.

"But it's difficult once you start pleasing people, 'cause you have to turn around and say, 'no, we've got to do it for us.' Obviously people expect certain things. Every time we play or something they say why does it sound like this, and they'll tear it apart, because suddenly the opportunity is there to be torn apart. You have to ignore it, and say 'I like this anyway, who gives a fuck?' We worked and toured our nuts off..."

Jonny quickly heads off Thom's minor rant. "It's a shame that so many bands have to rely on America and England and look no further afield. We get a big kick out of being able to do that."

Our prince of pessimism continues his streak. "There was a point where it got downright silly."

to be just another NAIL in the COFFIN, really, in the COFFIN of shall remain NAMELESS."
— thom yorke

"Yeah, you do become jukeboxes," Jonny concurs.

Thom continues, "You're not really playing, you're just fucking standing there and the amps are going."

"We spent over one and a half years without any rehearsal on any new songs, which was rather surreal. Even if we had a few new songs to put in, but we didn't even have time to write those. So *that* was really frustrating," sighs Jonny.

Working on the new songs saved their future. Thom exclaims, "It clicked, and we were like 'shit, *this* is what we're doing it for!' It's ridiculous."

The two spend a few minutes trying to sort through how many tours they had done in the past years, weaving a travel skein dense enough to scare a road atlas planner. Thom concludes by proudly asserting he writes constantly while on tour, but no songs on *The Bends* whine about touring. Good lad.

"*This is our new song/ just like the last one/ a total waste of time.*" 'My Iron Lung,' the cunningly snide single that heralded Radiohead's return to reality in Britain, has a distinctive pedigree.

"'Iron Lung' was supposed to be just another nail in the coffin.. the final nail in the coffin, really, in the coffin of the previously song that shall remain nameless." Thom offers a strained little smile before he continues. "But it just wasn't that at all... we released it because we found it very exciting when we listened to it. It was essentially a live recording tidied up, the audience taken out. We didn't want to release it sounding live and have the audience cheering... that would be really crap."

In my fruitless quest to understand the music industry, I must ask what was the point of 'Iron Lung' being released as a single only to college stations in America? It slid out and died mohths before *The Bend's'* release.

"*Slid* is a *good* word for it," laughs Thom as he stares into the distance.

When one asks why was it allowed to die, there's no straight answer. Since the band couldn't support the single, because they were finishing the album, it wasn't a priority... or something like that.

Thom mumbles, "Funny, we never got any straight answers either." He even took his questions to the top brass but that got him nothing but a reputation.

Jonny carefully recites like a child repeating a hated lesson. "It was released to colleges, and suddenly it was being played by some other stations, but there was no real release planned, but oh never mind, we'll just see what happens... it's like..." Jonny affects a totally confused air. "It's like you don't have to play it, that's all right. *What?* This is *strange*. I don't think any harm would be done by people hearing it outside of colleges. People can hear it: I'm not *embarrassed* by it."

"I like it. I *can* hold a tune," scoffs Thom. "It's fine, bullocks, who cares."

Thom and Jonny obviously do.

Radiohead's extended road trip gained them new fans, but the novelty began to wear off once they realized the loop they were trapped in. Their desperate need to create new work began to destroy their excitement. "The only trouble with doing all this touring is it just slows you down, it really slows you down," frets Jonny. "The first album was recorded two and a half years ago..."

"We just finished touring it. It's fucking crazy!" Thom declares.

It drove them so fucking crazy that they decided to go back out in the midts of creating *The Bends*. *Huh?* Help me, guys!

Thom claims this allowed then to getperspective on the album's creation. "Obviously as it was the second album, it was difficult to make. The best way to see clear is to get out of the studio again and to do what we're quite good at, then go back in."

Hence the release of the *Iron Lung* EP. Thom describes it as a section of songs that didn't fit into the album. "You could say that they are outtakes, but they're a bit more than outtakes, really. They are songs that just didn't get on the album. So we said fuck it, we'll release it as a set of songs. The EP was just for fans, really. We made sure that it would be available throughout the world. It's for Radiohead fans and we think they're good otherwise we wouldn't have plugged them on."

They are good. So's the whole album. Not an instant hit single in sight: what a relief. Just a clutch of luscious broken glass and tonic cocktails that go down with stunning ease... which explains why it went in at number 200 out of 200 on the *Billboard* charts. People's tastebuds are too numbed by the bland wilderness created by world class talents such as White Zombie and Bush to enjoy Radiohead's dangerous bouquet.

It's time to pile into the towncar. These babies are surprisingly wonderful places to do interviews. I never realized that: they're very soundproof, and if you want a captive audience look no further. Thom and Jonny, trapped knee to knee with me. Besides, British bands usually don't want to go running off unescorted into the NYC night.

Where were we... does it matter? There's a new dynamic in Radiohead's song writing: Thom's voice follows the music with such aching precision that certain songs, especially the stunning 'High and Dry,' meld with your mind from the first listen.

"There's a lot of harmonies," offers Jonny.

Thom reasons, "A lot of it has to do with that we're using the melodies as much as the voice, rather then here's the voice, here's lots of noise, here's some drums in the background, which is what *everyone* is doing, and it's really fucking dull."

"And a waste of two instruments," declares Jonny.

"There's just a lot of bands around [doing that], and I won't name names cause I've gotten out of that habit, " Thom jests.

Jonny quietly adds, "Smart move."

Radiohead have a refreshing perspective on music. Raw power combined with subtly make Radiohead the descendants of Sonic Youth in their intricate foreplay between slashing guitars and voice. But what a voice: that marvelously flexible instrument is cable of angelic tones and tortured snarls within the same lyrical sequence.

In short, Radiohead is not the new Smiths or the new Beatles: intead, Radiohead is a musical black sheep.

Thom is amused at the thought. "We certainly are outsiders in Britain."

"There are so many bands that all sound like each other, and that's not a very healthy thing at the moment," stresses Jonny.

Thom waxes generous, confessing, "But there are a lot a lot of brilliant bands in Britain at the moment. There is a lot of confidence, which there wasn't before."

"A pinnacle for bands isn't the success in America, conquer America thing," Jonny adds. "It doesn't really hold much water with bands in Britain right now, because they look at the bands that have failed, like the Smiths and the Stone Roses, and they know it's not the British band's fault."

"It's all just bullshit again, but then it always is: it's the nature of the

business. For the moment, we're trying to get around it, because we could easily find ourselves in the same position," muses Thom. "Second albums can be great if the band had no success on the first album. The plan was to work on the second album... we were all ready to go then..."

The song that shall remain nameless propelled Radiohead into the public ear. Thom hates talking abut 'Creep,' since that song broke the band in more ways then one. It's understandable: would you enjoy being known as that 'Creep' guy? When Thom mentioned he had a steady girlfriend the press howled how dare he: he's supposed to be a tortured creep. No, folks, Thom's much more the prince of perpetual pissed offness then of shattered vulnerability. He's a cutting complainer, not a whiny creep. But he gets no pity for Radiohead's success. He'll just have to get over that tragedy.

When we shared hot tea before the release of *Pablo Honey* Thom's mindset was this is the album where the band searched for themselves: the second album would be where they found it. Oceans of tea and maps of miles later, have they found Radiohead?

Thom is answereing before my thought is finished. "There was a point when we were in the Manor, when we were all sitting there going 'yes, this is US!' *Hello*! We were shaking our heads and going 'hello, this is all right!'" he laughs. "That's our thing, isn't it: we were in the studio and we were enjoying it, for the first time *completely* enjoying it, and getting a real kick out of it. The first album was just as Radiohead, but this one is more in-ti-mate, it's not very brash, it's not punk at all, or whatever word you Americans want to use today. Punk... *right*..."

Watch it, bud. I don't hang with psuedo punkers.The only thing Radiohead has in common with Green Day is both vocalists affect British accents, only in Thom's case, there's a logical reason. He's British.

When the limo makes its final hard left Thom and Jonny quickly explain why they decided to work with veteran producer/ miracle worker John Leckie.

Thom sums him up in three words. "He's a genius."

"He didn't treat us like he had some kind of witchcraft that only he understands. There's no mystery to it, which is so refreshing," enthuses Jonny in a rapid torrent. "All the time he would just sit back and say, 'well, *you* do it, *you* take control,' but them sometimes we'd get out of our depth and that's when he'd step in and calm us down."

Thom wraps up. "He saw what he had to do, and what he had to do was to get rid of our phobia of studios. We might actually go back in and record stuff for a laugh, as a form of leisure, as something we'd *like* to do."

That's shocking. With that I deliver them into MTV's clutches. Thom's muttering about Kennedy... last time they had the misfortune to be interviewed by her and if she shows up again Thom's walking out. I'm not waiting to see what happens: I'm too hungry.

A ew weeks later Thom and Jonny are being tortured via more acoustic dates. We arrange to resume our chat. A positively vibrant Jonny bounds out of the hotel elevator, claiming he called Thom but he is taking a nap. That's Thom's loss, the little cree... *critter*.

Let's toss around a few adjective regarding *The Bends*. It's full of devastating songs, from the aching bleak emotion of 'Black Star' to the raucous insult of 'Just.' 'Bones' is insultingly manipulative, becoming your best friend immediately. Then there's the delicately morose 'High and Dry,'a song that screamed single in a way 'Fake Plastic Trees' didn't...

"In a nice way, yeah," Jonny agrees. "When I heard it for the first time, because there's a whole history behind it, it was recorded as a demo a year and a half ago and we forgot about it, and then we had vague memories of it. Our manager remembered it, and we thought no, it's not very good, but he got the tapes of it and when I heard it again after over a year, it reminded me of, and this is very egotistical of me, oh, all these interruptions of my own sentences, how very terrible..." he laughs. This is Jonny, shy quiet Jonny talking his handsome head off? Of course Prince Pissed-Off isn't around to dampen his enthusiasm...

"It reminded me of that song 'Mull of Kincade' [a Paul McCartney/Wings tune], that really horrible kind of single, but in a *nice* way. It was one of those songs that people hopefully would be playing as soon as they learned guitar or something," he laughs.

That's not egotistical: the song stays with you from first listening. It doesn't sound planned: it just has that wonderful feel to it. Most of this albums has that quality: it's disgustingly fine.

"Which is funny 'cause the cliché about 'Creep' is every interview began with 'so, is it true that it was recorded by accident? Blah, blah blah...' and what is strange is that this album was recorded like that. You can go through all the songs on it and they are demos we were going to throw away, or we recorded them on first take, or in the case of 'My Iron Lung,' we recorded that during a live show. It all happened again, but 12 times over, which is part of the reason it turned out as well as it has, why we're so happy with it."

Lanky Jonny's body language is far from happy. A round glass table top affords me a clear view of his jackknifed angles and ankle-gripping fingers. That unfairly thick dark hair sweeps the table top while his cheek flirts with the surface. Jonny looks tortured but sounds perfectly confident. I'm trying not to stare...really trying...

Thom's absolutely correct in claiming this album is Radiohead: it's a powerful feeling, to hear a band sound so much like *themselves*. How re-

PHOTO BY SANDRA C. DAVIS

freshing. How *brave*. But the reaction to this album depends on what people like the band for: do they like Radiohead for their songwritiing? Or did they like the band only for *that* song: if so, they'll be wasting their time on *The Bends*. Stick with radio and suck your thumb: you won't get it.

Jonny's following along, replying, "That's why 'Creep' was so unplanned, because we always thought we would be the type of band that would just put out an album and people would buy it, and we wouldn't have to hear anything from it. It's really naive to play the singles game, because everyone just treats singles as a marketing device, which is all they are now: no one *buys* singles. We've never done that very well, and 'Creep' was a surprise obviously. I remember just after we finished it, Sean Slade [of Buffalo Tom and *Pablo Honey*'s producer] said 'Creep's really good, it's a shame that no one will get to hear it.' And that was the feeling behind that, which was fine, because that's the feeling behind *this* album. It's just an *album*.... isssh bibble, bibble, *what* am I going on about," he laughs, his cheek connecting with the glass as he widens his already startling eyes.

After recovering he re-emphasizes that it was a shame that Radiohead toured so much, since that whole process slowed the band's growth down so dramatically.

That brings us back to those demon rumors....was there really that much internal strife in the band during the tour from hell?

"Internal strife, mmmmm, yeah," Jonny agrees, clarifying, "Strife infers arguments and things being thrown, but it was *worse* than that. It was a very silent, cold thing, away from each other. No one was really talking to anyone, and we were just trying to get through the year, which was a mistake. I don't know, we got over it and started talking to each other about why we wanted to be in a band, that kind of stuff. There were never rows or anything, which is worse in a way. Everyone withdrew away."

That's difficult, especially during a tour, where a band needs to communicate in a special manner every night. Jonny describes trivial chat remained, but they stopped communicating about what was important to them. "It was different when we in Oxford, there was a different feel, a different atmosphere to us: we were living more normal lives. Then you just start living... " Jonny halts, his eyes enormous as he exclaims, "Ohhh, horrible cliché coming up, not day to day, but like that because your whole day is different every day because you're in a different city that day and you do things to amuse you and get you through the day, and it starts all over again the next day. You start living fragmented lives."

"No one was really TALKING to anyone, and we were just trying to get through the year, which was a MISTAKE."
—jonny greenwood

The band is comprised of very down-to-earth, intelligent people who weren't in a band for rock and roll stardom: and here it was thrust into their lives. Is that why it hit them that much harder?

Jonny looks thoughtful, replying, "No, I think it helped us enormously, because if we had wanted it, and it had happened, that would have been far more upsetting."

Sorry, I'm not following this theory at all.

Jonny ducks his head and explains, "When we first came over and 'Creep' was on MTV all the time, it meant *nothing* to us because we didn't have that MTV in England. We didn't really care. But by that same token when we were playing the Reading Festival a few months ago we were the most scared that we've ever been in our lives! We had went to Reading since we were 14 and you have dreams about playing there, and..." he laughs, "it all comes across as being surreal, what has happened to us, which goes back to the detachment we all started feeling, being in a surreal situation. It was very strange.

"I don't want to sound like I am complaining, there's nothing *worse* then the complaining moaning rock star, oh, *what* a disaster, but we've been loving the American thing, especially compared to a lot of British bands. That's the mistake that they make, you talk to British bands and while in England they talk about how they hate Americans and America, and it's bizarre. They have this strange double standard: on one hand they want to have a cover on the *NME* saying we conquered America, but on the other hand they want to have the Americans not being able to understand their music; 'we're above it, we're different, we're British:' and they *can't* have both! They want to pull you and poke you at the same time! "

There's always the old argument of 'look at the Smiths, how could those stupid Americans not have embraced them?' No one remembers *timing*: that was in the days when people had to claw their indie diet out from imports. Now when the labels are signing and marketing talent with an eye towards profits, you see a band like Oasis rapidly propelled into the pages of *Rolling Stone*. It's a whole new game over here now.

"I read one bizarre theory that America has resented the British invasion from the Beatles onwards. Allegedly: I find that very hard to believe. They meant Americans in the industry, not Americans as listeners," amends Jonny. "Are those people around anymore?"

Of course they are: they'll all the CEO's and VP's now. But Jonny said it earlier: British bands are offering a wide range of talent. They're baaaaack and certain Anglophiles are loving it.

I've always been an Anglophile, having grown up reading the occasional *Melody Maker or NME* I could find and thinking those bands *must* be cool, they're *British*. "How cool! I grew up with friends who did the same thing with American bands!" laughs Jonny. "And myself as well! I was excitedly talking about Tanya Donnely all morning when I was at school, Throwing Muses: I was so obsessed with all those bands. The grass is always greener... or cooler," he grins.

But one British band resents their own perceived coolness, their own success. Most bands want attention. Why not Radiohead?

Jonny is mulling this one over. "Hmmm, resentment. I don't know. Resentment...." There's a long pause as he death grips those ankles again. "We resented that we had gone from a band that wrote good songs, a band that wrote prolifically, and that was the most fun, certainly for Thom and me, we loved that. Then we played gigs, and we enjoyed that as well. But suddenly everything slowed down, and we thought we were trapped in one of those *Twilight Zone* slow time machines, and everything was drawn out. It was very strange: we could never play for fun anymore. We never got to rehearse. We weren't writing songs, which we had done for seven years. I've been writing songs since I was 13. Look what kind of songs we could write... " he halts. His hands whip up to press against the underside of the table as he put his head down again, his eyes wide with emotion.

That's as good an explanation as I am going to get. I don't want to torture such a sweet guy. I'm too soft. Actually, I'm not scaring Jonny: it's those acoustic gig he's scared as hell of. "The way I play the guitar, it depends on everyone else, to keep things moving, and if I do something too extreme no one will notice. Now I'm more exposed and it's harder. We do hate this acoustic thing. It's *evil*, the idea. We don't have barstools and we don't just play acoustic guitars. But it's horrible the power that MTV has to make these changes. Yuck! Why not just have MTV "Live Album"... that would be far more interesting. I wish Nirvana had done a live album for them. It would be more of a historical document, it'd be far more interesting, instead of resorting to something that makes it easier for their engineers. Really!" he sighs.

We curse oldster Eric Clapton for perpetuating such a crime. "See? He did it due to old age! It's so horrible! It smacks of something puritanical! Bleeah!" he shivers, gripping his slender upper arms. "It's like playing for your grandparents in your front room!"

We are saved from the dreaded notion by Thom's cheery arrival. "Good morning!" he laughs.

"It's about time," scolds Jonny.

"Sorry," murmurs Thom. He wasn't upstairs writing hits, either. "I am not really writing anything at all. I am writing words, but not any music."

"Thom's going to be a beat poet," confides Jonny.

"That could be due for a revival. We'll get some free form jazz behind it." Thom uses the table top as a bongo drum, affecting a beat poet's suave cool. "I'll start using dictation machines like *(Continued on page 60)*

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(Continued from page 43)

Captain Beefheart used to do. He obviously just walked around for days with a tape recorder in his pocket and every once in a while he'd get to the next line of what ever he was taking about. I have to get a little tiny dictation machine and be a completely pretentious bastard," he laughs.

Thom could get away with it. He's British.

The look that I receive should be framed. After some general complaints on the band's "bloody embarrassing" advertising campaign for *Pablo Honey*, Thom admits. "With this album, even if absolutely everything goes wrong, we can actually see beyond it now. We never really could before, because we were never in a position of strength before. So now there's a lot of people who have been waiting, who came to see us live, and knew what we could do. Suddenly whatever that was is translated into a record, and that's not just a live bombastic sound. It's not at all like that. But we're actually quite good, actually," he smiles. "The first album was good, but it didn't show the extent of what we could do, that's all. Because we couldn't do it yet."

"And we could do it a few months later," adds Jonny. "Funny how that is. And then we didn't get a chance to prove otherwise for two and a half years. But hopefully it will all be worth it."

"But we're actually quite GOOD, actually." —thom yorke

"Fuck it, there's nothing to moan about," concludes Thom. He should take naps more often: that's close to a positive reaction.

More simple complexity: this band became entangled in a long term relationship with an album they initially appreciated, but they were aching to prove they had more artistry in them. They ached for two more years. That about sums up the story.

Thom leans forward to declare. "That's the thing about bands like Pavement, they can whack out albums. They're *really* lucky. I wish we could do that. But we don't do that. It's two separate things. Once you've had a hit you're no longer able, unless you're the Stone Roses, to just carry on creating music. If that's all you do then it become self-indulgent anyway because you've got no external stimuli at all."

To Thom, having a hit is a horrible taint. His opinion is once you have a hit you can *never* get away from it. "Oh *yeah*. Mmm-hmm. If Pavement had a song that was as big as 'Creep' then what would they do? They wouldn't tour it, anyway, for a start. Maybe we shouldn't tour at all."

The newly quiet Jonny wants to make a little point. "Pavement, I saw them in England recently and I talked to them briefly afterwards, and they were like 'yeah, we have to get back to our *jobs*.'"

Thom finally laughs. Jonny got him there. "Yeah, we are fucking lucky, man. We can moan all we like, but we are *fucking lucky*." After that admirable statement he can't resist adding, "Stone Roses are *more* lucky though."

Jonny mutters something about seven years of being stoned. The Stoned Roses don't work hard enough for his tough standards.

Fucking lucky or not, Radiohead are now no longer willing to get run over by the powers that be. Ultimately the biggest problem with this band is they still take everything too personally and overanalyze it: that goes for their music, their lives and their relationships to each other. They give me a headache.

"That could be our downfall," admits Thom. "I am sure if we were ever placed in another band, we just wouldn't know what the fucking hell was going on. Within hours, we'd just be scratching our heads and laughing at everything, going 'what, you have to be *kidding*.' I'd get the screaming abdabs right away. Every band creates its own little environment in which they work, their own little bubble. A super reinforced bubble."

"It's not like any other band," murmurs Jonny, and he's right. I couldn't see Jonny running off to another band. "Well, Suede asked, but you know..." he laughs, rapidly admitting, "No, they didn't."

Thom winds back to his earlier point. "Over the past few days we were like we've done our bit now, we've made the record we had to make, now let everyone else sweat. And that's such an amazing feeling of release! I think the analysis will be stunted for a while, while we sit back and let things fall into place...or not. But it's a nice feeling that it's someone else's fucking problem now."

"Once it's on the CD it can't be changed," declares Jonny. "We were talking about how desperate we are to go in and do some b-sides, because we want to record new songs."

"And because we have gotten a sampler as well," grins Thom.

Jonny laughs, "Oh yes, we're trying to sound like Moonshake!"

"We feel duty-bound to get into technology," declares Thom.

You made some money off of those million or so albums you sold and you have to waste it somewhere. "Something like that," Thom grins.

You could always make more hideously expensive videos. Groans and moans follow from both as Thom announces, "Such a load of freaking bullshit." Thank you.

Radiohead also have that rare ability to create entire albums that sound classic from first chord to last. They know their own work too well. Thom doesn't profess to being any songwriting genius: he admits he has loads of bad songs at home. The entire band makes sure nothing weak slips onto their albums.

Jonny reinforces this point. "We recorded 24 songs, and the most heated discussions within the band are which ones go on. That's got to be healthy. Some bands just don't have that luxury."

"Yes, we write songs for a living." Thank you again, Thom.

Thom's also nothing like Steve Kilbey of the Church, who claims a song is worthless if he takes more than ten minutes on it. No struggling and sweating for Steve: and he also writes songs for a living...at least he used to...

Thom leans back and gives me a wonderfully confused look. "I don't understand that at all! I actually struggle *and* sweat!" he laughs. "Some songs happen in spite of... sometimes I've sat down and written a song in ten minutes. The most direct ones, yeah. I don't know. I write a bit of a song... very rarely do I write all of the words (at once.) And the song is nothing anyway unless it's put right by the band. It's fuck-all unless it's played right. I am not going to be some wandering fucking minstrel, am I? Like a troubadour, like Mr. Buckley was. He even called himself a troubadour. He was very good though."

After a flicker Thom adds, "He also had a guitarist that played out of tune!"

"*Meaning*? Implying?" questions Jonny with a mock threatening gesture. "He had this vibe player. Now *that's* getting nearer and nearer to lift music."

"It's jazz shit!" grins Thom. "There's the opening quote, shit, it's jazz shit."

I don't think so.

Jonny defends, "Well, there is lots of good music around."

"There is. An awful lot," agrees Thom.He's scaring me with agreeability.

Jonny exclaims, "Just throw a big stick in a record shop and you're bound to hit something worth hearing."

Thom stretches his thin frame then drawls, "Depends on what particular section of the shop you throw it in..."

"Well yes, not the military brass band section!" defends Jonny, rapidly adding, "And not the cha-cha section."

It's all personal opinion... times a few million.

"It's Freudian," wisely announces Thom.

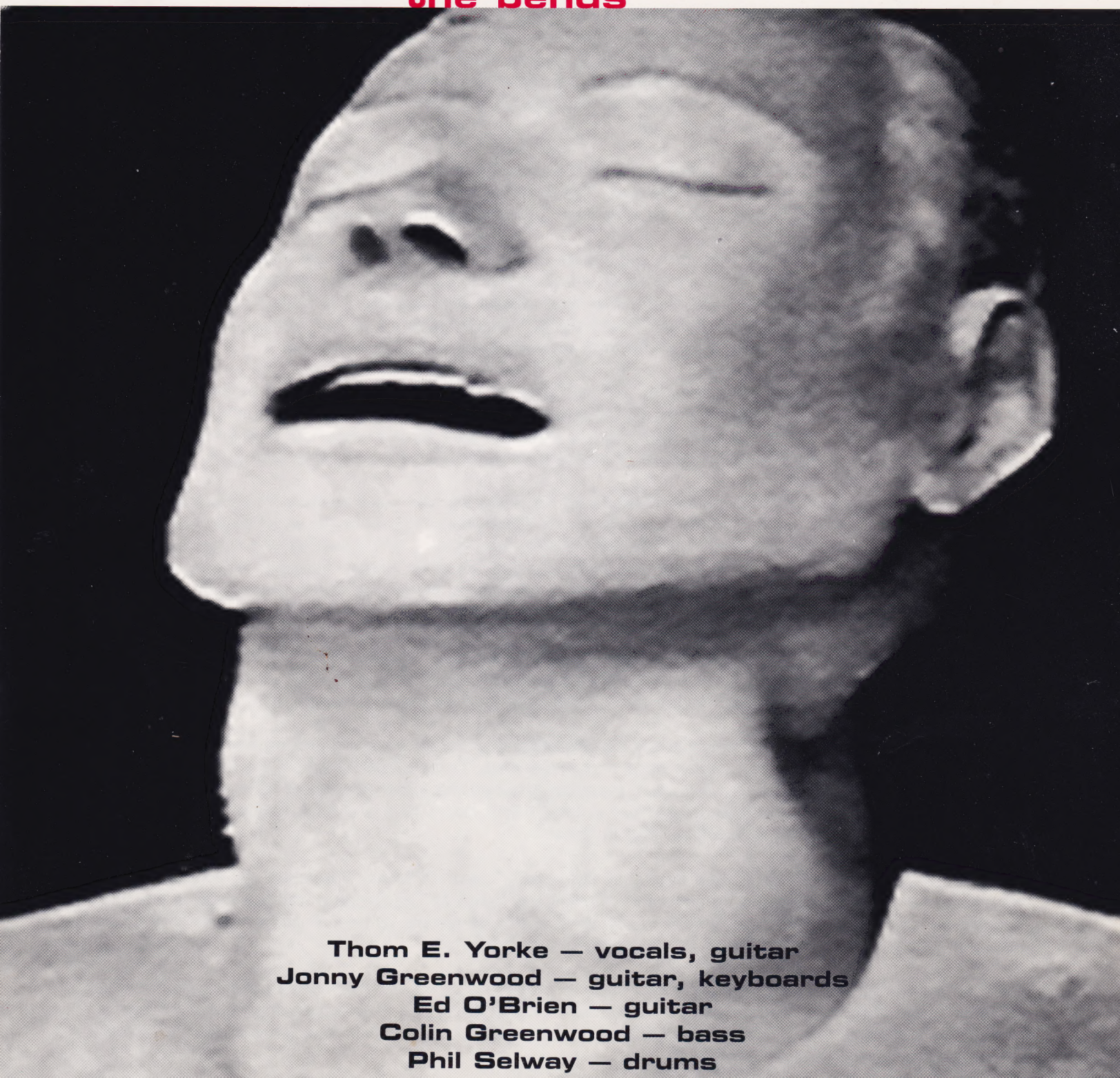
Oh enough. It's time to get these two back to their keepers before they say something I can start a heavy rumor with... what was that about beat poets?

By the way, if you care, 'Fake Plastic Trees' hit MTV's Buzz Bin. Two weeks or... 12 hit wonders, anyone?

B

RADIOHEAD

the bends



Thom E. Yorke — vocals, guitar
Jonny Greenwood — guitar, keyboards
Ed O'Brien — guitar
Colin Greenwood — bass
Phil Selway — drums

Rock 'n' roll is the most important thing in the world to the members of **Radiohead**. It's also the biggest joke. Coming to grips with that dichotomy is the key to understanding a remarkably unselfconscious, adventurous quintet that managed to make itself into one of today's most incendiary bands — while proudly claiming to be "the antithesis of the rock 'n' roll lifestyle."

"We're not purposely contradictory," says hyperkinetic singer **Thom Yorke**. "It just happens that we like to use our brains. If you consider what you're doing at all important, you'll pay more attention to it and not just get drunk 'round the pub until it's time to get onstage."

With The Bends, **Radiohead**'s second full-length Capitol album, the five natives of Oxford, England bare both brains and brawn, catapulting their sound into heretofore unexplored territory. While retaining the sonic mood swings and lyrical angst of its gold debut, Pablo Honey , **Radiohead** (abetted by producer John Leckie, who has worked with such artists as Stone Roses and Ride) have shaped these elements into compelling new shapes, from the acoustic introspection of "Bulletproof...I Wish I Was" (reminiscent of "Low"-era David Bowie) to the epic sweep of "Black Star."

"It took us a while to regroup, having spent so long on the road, where we began to feel like we were digging ourselves into a rut," says guitarist **Ed O'Brien**. "We worried for a bit that we might not have anything left to say, but when we got out into the country with John, everything fell into place."

No product of the sessions that produced The Bends sums up **Radiohead** better than the insinuatingly infectious "My Iron Lung" (which first popped up on an EP of the same name), wherein Yorke's languid vocals are cleaved by some monumentally distorted guitar from **Jonny Greenwood**. "We spent a good bit of time trying to escape from 'Creep,'" says Yorke. "The song was responsible for people coming to listen to us, yet it tethered us in a way. That mixture of feelings was what inspired 'My Iron Lung.'"

Custom-made for an age of self-evisceration, "Creep" became an unlikely anthem — "a worthy addition to rock's lexicon of angst," according to New York Newsday — for hordes of disaffected listeners, topping alternative rock charts and helping push Pablo Honey past the gold mark in America. But as O'Brien puts it, "Anyone who thinks of **Radiohead** in terms of just one song is severely underestimating us."

That kind of drive and intensity has marked **Radiohead** from the day the band formed at the tail end of the '80s: "We began out of sheer boredom," recalls Yorke. "Everything had become so sedate, with all the shoegazing bands on one side and electronic dance music on the other." While pursuit of college educations forced music to the sidelines for a spell, the band staged its first proper assault on the collective consciousness in the summer of 1991. Just a few weeks later, they'd received more than 20 record company offers.

"It may sound pretentious, but it wasn't really a surprise to me," shrugs Yorke. "There was so much apathy around, and no one in Britain was doing anything to combat it except us. We were initially warned that our attitude was too 'American' or something like that, but we just carried on doing our own thing."

Much to the delight of both audiences and critics, **Radiohead**'s "thing" revolved around a live performance dubbed "perfect" by Melody Maker, which went on to rave that "to say **Radiohead** show promise is to say that Hendrix played guitar." The same fervent reaction greeted the initial release of "Creep," (which was named one of the top British singles of the year in both 1992 and 1993) and such follow-ups as "Anyone Can Play Guitar" and the tongue-in-cheek "Pop Is Dead."

"We're not a pop band in the truest sense of the word," says O'Brien, "because we don't consider ourselves to be ephemeral and of-the-moment. I think if you listen to The Bends a few years down the line, you won't be able to pinpoint it as 'a 1995 record.' It would be simple to cash in on a momentary trend like a lot of pop bands do, but it would be incredibly unsatisfying."

There's nothing transient about the pleasures offered up by The Bends as **Radiohead** careens from heady psychedelia (the swirling "Planet Telex") to visceral enticement (the unapologetically harsh riffing of "Bones"). Its emotional depth and sonic audacity demand full immersion. Feel free to jump in, but remember the title, and extricate yourself with care.

RADIOHEAD

the bends

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